VISIT…

Visionary FILM

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FILM *isionary*

The American Avant-Garde 1943–2000

THIRD EDITION

P. Adams Sitney

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Printed in the United States of America
on acid-free paper

To the memory of Jay Leyda, Jacques Ledoux,
and Adam and Oliver Parry

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Preface to the Third Edition

THE IDEA OF A THIRD edition of *Visionary Film* began in Paris, where in recent years the American avant-garde cinema has found an enthusiastic audience. Christian Lebrat, the publisher of Paris Experimental editions, proposed to translate the book, together with Pip Chodorov. They urged me to write a new chapter that would survey the field since the issue of the second edition.

In those twenty-one years the American avant-garde cinema has changed dramatically, above all, because of the great numbers of film-makers who continue to work in its inherited genres, to transform them, and to invent new ones. The films of the past two decades are so many and so varied that it would not be possible to discuss, even summarily, the best of them in one supplementary chapter. I have decided, instead, to delineate what I take to be the most important historical and morphological changes within the field. Even under that limitation I do not have the space to deal with individual films in the

detail they are afforded in the rest of the book. Even if I had succumbed to the powerful temptation to write only about the newer films of those artists I had previously treated, I could barely touch upon them. The work of Brakhage alone since 1978 would require at least three chapters for discussion on a scale consistent with the analysis of his work before that date. (I say three chapters simply because that is the number I have drafted in an unfinished book.)

I remain convinced that the most conspicuous absence in *Visionary Film* is the magnificent work of Marie Menken. However, I will not be able to remedy that until I have completed another book on which I have been working for some years. There I shall also attempt to correct my neglect of Ian Hugo's films. Of the film-makers who began to attract attention in the 1970s, Ernie Gehr and Robert Beavers, whom I discussed in the supplementary chapter of the second edition, continue to assert their preeminence with their films of the '80s and '90s. However, with the test of time, my failure to write about some of their contemporaries, particularly Warren Sonbert, Andrew Noren, James Benning, and Peter Hutton, grows more conspicuously short-sighted. Furthermore, although I had acknowledged the power of Yvonne Rainer's films in the second edition, I understood them to be outside of the central, visionary tradition within the avant-garde cinema. A recognition of their sources in Godard and Bergman influenced my judgment. But the directions many of the major avant-garde film-makers of the '80s and '90s explored have proven me wrong: Rainer was the most powerful new influence on a new generation of avant-garde film-makers who did not necessarily share her wariness of the pioneer generation and its culture. Films by James Benning, Abigail Child, Su Friedrich, and Marjorie Keller showed me how central she was and how her achievements were to be reintegrated within a tradition she sometimes disdained.

Lack of space is hardly my only reason for writing in the retrospective chapter largely about film-makers long established and many of whom appeared in the two earlier editions. I can no longer claim the familiarity with the scope of American avant-garde film production I had twenty-five years ago. Since then the tribe of professional observers has bifurcated in the face of such widespread film-making. Those most familiar with the new films of the past twenty years are the programmers and curators, virtually full-time viewers, of avant-garde showcases and museums in a few metropolitan centers. As a professor at Princeton University for the past twenty years, I worked necessarily within the second group, the critics and scholars who see (and teach) far fewer new films and who depend upon the advice and decisions of the programmers in a way that had not been essential twenty-five years before. In this respect, avant-garde film-making has mimicked the situation of the other arts where critics and scholars writing on poetry or painting could not be aware of all of the work published or shown. Readers seeking an appreciation of the achieve-

ments of the most important younger film-makers will have to look elsewhere.

The availability of videotapes of some of the films I had described in detail has allowed me to cut about a twelfth of the second edition by eliminating many elaborate descriptions. That space has been reclaimed by the reintroduction of the chapter on Gregory Markopoulos, thanks to Robert Beavers's generous permission to quote from the film-maker's theoretical writings.

I have liberally incorporated into the first few chapters of this edition passages from my "Introduction" to *The Avant-garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism*, which is no longer in print; for that text had benefited from the revisionary reflections I had inevitably had after *Visionary Film* was first published.

In rewriting the endnotes, I have tried to indicate fruitful directions viewers may turn for critical discussions that amplify or contest the interpretations I offer here. However, that apparatus is far from exhaustive. The bibliography of the avant-garde cinema in English continues to expand geometrically. I am particularly grateful to the scholars and critics who have noted errors in the earlier editions of this book. I have attempted to correct them here. However, I do not have space to respond to critics who have objected to my fundamental theses or critical methods, but to them too I owe a debt of thanks for stimulating my thought.[1]

Owing to copyright restrictions, some non-cinematic art illustrations have been removed from this edition. Some readers may want to consult the first two editions or look up the following works in conjunction with the stills I have included. René Magritte's *La Clef des champs* (1936), *Le Domaine d'Arnheim* (1949), and *La Soir qui tombe* (1964, Menil Collection in Houston, which I had used originally) illustrate his imagery of shattered windows with the exterior image fixed on the shards of glass. These resonate with the sequence from *Meshes of the Afternoon* printed on p. 14. Again, Magritte's *La Condition humaine* (1933), *La Belle captive* (1947, 1948, and c. 1965), and *La Grande Marée* (1951) demonstrate the paradoxes of a frame, which I found relevant to *The Petrified Dog*, p. 60. Any of Willem de Kooning's many *Woman* paintings would provide a parallel to the image from *Thigh Line Lyre Triangular*, p. 170, evoking the tension between iconography and broad painterly marks in Abstract Expressionist space. I had used his *Woman with a Green and Beige Background* (1966, now owned by the Grey Art Gallery at New York University). Similarly, Jackson Pollock's *Cut Out* (1948–1950, now owned by the Ohara Museum in Kurashiki, Japan) had paralleled the play of positive and negative space in the strip from *Dog Star Man: Part Three* on p. 207. Wassily Kandinsky's hard-edged abstractions from the 1920s bear a close resemblance to several of Harry Smith's so-called *Early Abstractions*, p. 244. A sequence of four collage pages from Max Ernst's picture novel, *La Femme 100 Têtes* (1929), where such sequences are numerous, illustrated

the narrative and digressive quality Smith adopted in his long animated film, *No. 12*. Finally, I had rather arbitrarily chosen Joseph Cornell's *Medici Boy Box* (c. 1953, Fort Worth Museum) to stand next to the image of the woman looking out a window in *A Legend for Fountains*, p. 333, to illustrate the veil of glass Cornell put into play in most of his shadow boxes.

Princeton, N.J. P. A. S.
January 2002

Preface to the First Edition

WHEN I FIRST CONCEIVED of this book in 1968, it was to have been a short collection of interpretations of a selected number of films made by American independent film-makers. At that time I was taking the International Exhibition of the New American Cinema to a number of European film archives and universities. In the repeated screenings of a large collection of films I was able to become very familiar with the works I wanted to interpret, and in my lectures on those occasions I had an opportunity to refine my ideas. Yet when it came to writing a book, two years later, that original plan expanded into this lengthy study.

The interpretation of individual films spread to the consideration of the whole career of their makers. Then the question of the relationship of one film-maker to another arose. Soon I found my work moving in a direction that could lead to a life-long enterprise, a history and analysis of the American avant-garde film in several volumes, continually to be revised to

encompass new films. At that point I had to clarify my aspirations and define my topic.

The earliest American films discussed here were called "film poems" or "experimental films" when they were first seen. Both names, like all the subsequent ones, are inaccurate and limiting. Of the two, the term "film poem" has the advantage of underlining a useful analogy: the relationship of the type of film discussed in this book to the commercial narrative cinema is in many ways like that of poetry to fiction in our times. The film-makers in question, like poets, produce their work without financial reward, often making great personal sacrifices to do so. The films themselves will always have a more limited audience than commercial features because they are so much more demanding. The analogy is also useful in that it does not put a value on the films in question. Poetry is not by essence better than prose. "Experimental" cinema, on the other hand, implies a tentative and secondary relationship to a more stable cinema.

Both terms fell out of use in the late fifties. In their places arose the "New American Cinema" on the model of the French Nouvelle Vague, and the "underground" film, in response to an increased social commitment on the part of certain newly emerging film-makers. Very few film-makers were ever satisfied with any of these labels. "Avant-garde" is itself unfortunate. On the one hand, it implies a privileged relationship to a norm which I do not wish to affirm, and on the other hand it has been used to describe thousands of films which fall outside the scope of this book, some of which are excellent and many of which are very bad. I have chosen to use the term "avant-garde" cinema throughout the book simply because it is the one name which is not associated with a particular phase of the thirty-year span I attempt to cover.

The precise relationship of the avant-garde cinema to American commercial film is one of radical otherness. They operate in different realms with next to no significant influence on each other. In the forties when the first generation of native independent film-makers learned their art, young people could not make films freely within the industry. A long apprenticeship was required and the division of functions (writer, producer, director, cameraman) was jealously protected. In reaction the young American film-makers turned to the European avant-garde tradition. But unlike the painters and poets who had made films in the twenties, they did not stop film-making after one or two efforts when they did not find commercial support. They continued to make films, responding to each other's work and to the forces that were active in American painting, poetry, and dance around them.

The commercial film industry was in fact so conservative that in France a new critical theory was developing in response to the loss of directorial authority in American films. The followers of André Bazin enunciated "la politique des auteurs," which sought out the stylistic constants in the films of directors who had to work under factory-like conditions. This critical method was later imported into America as the "au-

teur theory." However there have always been two independent strains in the theory of cinema. One goes back to the psychologist Hugo Munsterberg and includes the writings of other psychologists, sociologists, and philosophers such as Arnheim, Kracauer, and Merleau-Ponty, as well as Bazin, and has tried to understand what constitutes the whole cinematic experience. The other strain includes the theories of film-makers themselves from Delluc and Epstein in France through the great Soviet theoreticians Kuleshov, Vertov, Pudovkin, and Eisenstein. They have sought the ideal essence of cinema, and their theories have been concerned with how films should be made. While French and American critics were propounding the auteur theory for the cinema of the forties and fifties, major theoretical writing was being produced by the film-makers within the American avant-garde. Deren, Brakhage, Markopoulos, and Kubelka were defining new potentials for the cinema.

American avant-garde film theory has received even less critical attention than the films. Therefore I have assumed the task of commenting on the major theoretical works of the period, and I have tried to analyze the theoretical stance of those film-makers who have responded in their films if not in their writings to these issues. The selection of film-makers to be discussed here has been guided as much by their commitment to the major theoretical concerns as by my original list of films to interpret.

Just as the chief works of French film theory must be seen in the light of Cubist and Surrealist thought, and Soviet theory in the context of formalism and constructivism, the preoccupations of the American avant-garde film-makers coincide with those of our post-Romantic poets and Abstract Expressionist painters. Behind them lies a potent tradition of Romantic poetics. Wherever possible, both in my interpretation of films and discussion of theory, I have attempted to trace the heritage of Romanticism. I have found this approach consistently more useful and more generative of a unified view of these films and film-makers than the Freudian hermeneutics and sexual analyses which have dominated much previous criticism of the American avant-garde film.

In the course of writing, historical patterns emerged which I have allowed to control the structure of the book. I have had to invent a series of terms—the trance film, the mythopoeic film, the structural film, and the participatory film—in order to describe this historical morphology. It is almost too obvious to point out that the film-makers themselves did not think in these categories when they made their films. Many of them will, of course, resist my categorizing them at all.

The thirty-year period which this book covers has seen vast changes in the incidental circumstances of avant-garde film-making and distribution. Many of the film-makers discussed here have been able to earn their living in the past few years as professors of film theory and film-making. This is a function of the increasing interest in this mode of film-making shown by the academic community. Hundreds of colleges now regularly screen avant-garde films; they have become an essential part of the pro-

gram of the nation's few film archives. Literally hundreds of new independent films are made and distributed every year. All this has occurred without any significant influence on the programming of commercial theaters.

Naturally the vast majority of independent films produced in any year are of very low quality, as is the year's poetry, painting, or music by and large. This book does not pretend to be exhaustive of American avant-garde film-making. Nor does it discuss the work of all the most famous and important film-makers. Major figures such as Ed Emshwiller, Stan VanDerBeek, Storm De Hirsch, and Shirley Clarke, to name a few, are not discussed here. This book attempts to isolate and describe the visionary strain within the complex manifold of the American avant-garde film.

New York P. A. S.
January 1974

Acknowledgments

I BEGAN WRITING *Visionary Film* in 1969 for a series of books on cinema conceived and edited by Annette Michelson. Even though its ultimate publication was not in that series, she has consistently encouraged and aided me in every stage of its production. I am deeply grateful for the advice she has given me concerning both the general structure and the details of the book.

Over the same span of time Ken Kelman has been a sounding board for many of the ideas and observations that I had during the time of writing the first edition. His responses are often reflected in this work. Willard Van Dyke and the Film Department of the Museum of Modern Art invited me to give a series of lectures in the spring of 1971 where I was able to give the first public presentation of the central theses of the book.

I cannot imagine how this work would have been possible were it not for Anthology Film Archives. In its theater I was able to re-see numerous times the films discussed here, and its vast library of books and documents on the avant-garde cinema

was the foundation of my research. My assistants there, Caroline Angell and Kate Manheim, spent many hours helping me prepare detailed screening notes from which much of the book was written.

Cecily Coddington who typed most of the manuscript suggested many stylistic changes that were incorporated. Jonas Mekas and Steven Koch read and commented on the typed text. For their insights I am grateful. At Oxford University Press my editor, James Raimes, and Leona Capeless were uncommonly helpful common readers of this specialized book. My particular thanks go to Robert Pattison who worked with me through the more than seven hundred–page typescript with exceptional patience.

The more elaborate and complex stills reprinted here were made by Babette Mangolte; other illustrations were provided by Anthology Film Archives, the Stills Archive of the Film Department of the Museum of Modern Art, and *Artforum* magazine. Tom Hopkins kindly helped me through the proofreading and Nora Manheim made the index. Georges Borchardt, my agent, helped me in numerous ways.

Julia Sitney, then my wife, convinced me, in 1968 on a train in Norway, that this book should be written. She was consistently encouraging, especially in my most desperate moments.

The intellectual debts of *The Visionary Film* are numerous. There were no times during the writing of it that I was not covetously reading or rereading articles and books by Maurice Blanchot, Geoffrey Hartman, and Paul de Man. But my debt to Harold Bloom must be singled out. While I was at my typewriter at least one of his books was always on my desk and in continual use.

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Visionary FILM

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Meshes of the afternoon

one

THE COLLABORATION OF Maya Deren and Alexander Hammid shortly after their marriage in 1942 recalls in its broad outline and its aspiration the earlier collaboration of Salvador Dali and Luis Buñuel on *Un Chien Andalou* (1928). By a surrealistic principle, Dali and Buñuel sought to combine images so that one would bear no logical or rational connection to the next. This principle was not original to the authors of *Un Chien Andalou*, although it never had so rigorous an application in cinema before them. Others, of course, had extended the mechanics of "the Exquisite Corpse" into literature and painting. The Exquisite Corpse, in its purest form, is drawn by a number of persons upon a piece of paper folded so that one can draw the head, another the neck and shoulders, another the trunk, and so on, without any one contributor's seeing the work of the others. The unfolded paper reveals the synthetic, radically malformed figure—the Exquisite Corpse.

In his first autobiography Dali describes the effect of the film:

> The film produced the effect that I wanted, and it plunged like a dagger into the heart of Paris as I had foretold. Our film ruined in a single evening ten years of pseudo-intellectual post-war advance-guardism.
>
> That foul thing which is figuratively called abstract art fell at our feet, wounded to the death, never to rise again, after having seen "a girl's eye cut by a razor blade"—this was how the film began. There was no longer room in Europe for the little maniacal lozenges of Monsieur Mondrian.[1]

Perhaps in 1928 *Un Chien Andalou* looked as indecipherable and shocking as Dali's account would suggest. I doubt it. Buñuel too has written a note on the film:

> In the working out of the plot every idea of a rational, esthetic or other preoccupation with technical matters was rejected as irrelevant. The result is a film deliberately anti-plastic, anti-artistic, considered by traditional canons. The plot is the result of a CONSCIOUS *psychic automatism*, and, to that extent, it does not attempt to recount a dream, although it profits by a mechanism analogous to that of dreams.
>
> The producer-director of the film, Buñuel, wrote the scenario in collaboration with the painter Dali. For it, both took their point of view from a dream image, which, in its turn, probed others by the same process until the whole took form as a continuity. It should be noted that when an image or idea appeared the collaborators discarded it immediately if it was derived from remembrance, or from their cultural pattern or if, simply, it had a conscious association with another earlier idea. They accepted only those representations as valid which, though they moved them profoundly, had no possible explanation. Naturally, they dispensed with the restraints of customary morality and of reason. The motivation of the images was, or meant to be, purely irrational! They are as mysterious and inexplicable to the two collaborators as to the spectator. NOTHING, in the film, SYMBOLIZES ANYTHING. The only method of investigation of the symbols would be, perhaps, psychoanalysis.[2]

What Dali and Buñuel achieved through this method of compiling a scenario was the liberation of their material from the demands of narrative continuity. Far from being puzzling, the film achieves the clarity of a dream. The extremity of the violence and the calculated abruptness of changes of time, place, and mood intensify the viewing experience without

satisfying the conventional narrative demands of cause and effect. The concentration on only two actors, male and female, and the insistence on tactile imagery set up a situation of identification that more randomly organized films do not have. The strength of the identification in the context of the abrupt dislocations and discontinuities provides us with a vivid metaphor for the dream experience. Had Dali and Buñuel set about to study their own dreams and clinically re-create a dream on film, they could not have surpassed *Un Chien Andalou*.

The film begins with a cliché and then a paroxysm of violence. After the title "Once Upon a Time," a man, played by Buñuel himself, slowly and carefully sharpens a straight razor and slices the eye of the heroine. The horror of this opening is intensified by an extended visual metaphor. As he is sharpening the razor, Buñuel looks with entranced madness at the moon just as a sliver of cloud is about to cross it. At the moment of cutting the eyeball, the film shows the cloud slicing across the moon's circle. The image is both a reflected horror and a relief: horrible in the precision with which it suggests the cutting of the eye, and a relief in that the viewer for a moment thinks that the metaphor has spared him the actual slicing. But immediately we see the razor finishing its work and the interior of the eye pouring out. The strategies of metaphor, synecdoche, and metonomy by which the illusions of causality and simultaneity in the film are sustained become the structural models of the film's formal development. We are forced to see the metaphor of the moon, whose very tranquility evokes terrible violence, followed by an even more violent synecdoche.

The title which follows, "Eight Years Later," seems to promise a causal account. The action disappoints the expectation. A man dressed as a clown, with a striped box held by a thong around his neck, rides his bicycle through city streets. When he falls from it a young woman rushes out of her house, embraces him on the ground, and removes the box around his neck. Back in her room, she lays out the articles of his clothing and the box as if to reconstruct the man from these mute objects. But suddenly she sees that he is at the other end of the room, now dressed in a suit, and staring at the palm of his hand, out of which ants are crawling.

In a series of dissolves the ants become a woman's armpit, which in turn becomes a sea urchin and then the top of an androgynous head. The head belongs to a character who stands in the street where the bicyclist had fallen, poking a dismembered hand with a long stick. A crowd gathers around her like ants around the hole in the hand. The police intervene; they push back the crowd; and one of them picks up the hand, places it in the striped box, and gives it to her. As she clutches it to her breast, an automobile runs her down. The figure of synecdoche is at stake here. The film-makers create the illusion of ants emerging from the hand by means of a model shown in close-up. That illusion immediately engenders a hyperbolical series of metaphors, calling attention to the concept of metaphor. When they use the model hand as a prop in the street scene, it becomes a metaphor for a synecdoche. Similarly, the oozing eyes of the

dead donkeys in the scene that follows this reveal a possible source for the montage substitution on the earlier sliced eye.[3]

The young woman and the cyclist watch this episode from their upstairs window. He is excited to madness. As blood trickles from his mouth, he feels the bare breasts and buttocks of his companion. She tries to escape him, but he pursues her, pulling after him two grand pianos loaded with dead donkeys. She rushes into the next room and slams the door, but she catches his hand in the process. The palm, caught in the door and crawling with ants, horrifies her. Then she notices that he is in the same room with her, although he is now dressed in the clown suit and lying on the bed.

The next episode begins with the title "Around Three in the Morning." A new character, seen from the back for a long time, rushes in on them. He punishes the protagonist by throwing his collar, frills, box, and thong out the window and making him stand in the corner. The title "Sixteen Years Before" appears without a change of scene, but now the action is in slow motion. The features of the newly arrived man look remarkably like the protagonist's. He seems to be chastising the cyclist as he would a schoolboy. The books he gives him turn to guns in his hands. With them the cyclist shoots his tormentor, who falls, not in the room, but in an open field against the back of a naked woman. Strollers in the field are indifferent to his corpse.

Back in the room, the cyclist and the young woman again confront each other. He has lost his mouth. Hair grows in its place. Annoyed by what she sees, she looks under her arm to find the hair there missing. She sticks her tongue out at him, opens the door behind her and finds herself on a windy beach with a new man. They laugh at the remnants of the cyclist—his collar, box, and thong—washed up by the waves. Arm in arm they stroll away.

Finally there is the title "In the Spring" followed by a still shot of the central couple, buried in sand, blinded, and covered with insects.

I have passed over many details of this very intricate film. The outline presented here preserves the abrupt changes of location, the basic action, and all the titles. Let us postpone for a moment further comment on this film, in order to present *Meshes of the Afternoon* and lay the basis for a comparison.

The fifteen years between *Un Chien Andalou* and *Meshes of the Afternoon* were not without scattered avant-garde film production.[4] In America, the outstanding works of this period sought their inspiration from Expressionism or from the achievements of still photography. The sort of dream narrative that the Dali-Buñuel film offered as a new cinematic possibility was not often explored.

Maya Deren's background had been literary and choric. She was born in Kiev in the year of the revolution, emigrated with her parents in 1922 to America, where her father, Dr. Solomon Deren, a psychiatrist, worked for and eventually directed the State Institute for the Feeble-minded in Syracuse, New York. After secondary schooling at the League of Nations

School in Geneva, Switzerland, she attended the University of Syracuse as a student of journalism until she married. She and her husband moved to New York, where they were both active in the Trotskyist movement. She took her Bachelor of Arts from New York University and divorced soon after.

During her first years in New York and until she began to make films, Maya Deren wrote poetry, but she was never satisfied with it. At the same time she developed an interest in modern dance. She was not a dancer herself—at least not a trained dancer. Her mother and friends recall the sudden, inspired, but undisciplined dances she would privately perform, especially in later years after her fieldwork in Haiti and her initiation into voodoo. In the early forties she conceived the idea of writing a theoretical book on modern dance and looked for a professional dancer to work with her. She interested Katherine Dunham in her project and traveled with her on her tour of 1940–1941. The book never materialized, but Katherine Dunham had introduced her to Alexander Hammid when her company was in Los Angeles. They married in 1942.

Alexander Hackenschmied, who later changed his name to Hammid, was a professional film-maker born in 1907 in Prague, Czechoslovakia, then working on a minor Hollywood project. He was well known in film-making circles as a cameraman, editor, and director. The best-known films he had worked on by that time were the documentaries *Zem Spieva* (*The Earth Sings*, 1933), *Crisis* (1938), *Lights Out in Europe* (1939), and *Forgotten Village* (1941).

They shot *Meshes of the Afternoon* in two and a half weeks in their own home with primitive 16mm equipment. They played in the film themselves. There was no script. They worked out the overall outline together and talked over the shooting details while making the film.

It has an intricate spiral structure based on the repetition, with variations, of the initial sequence of the film, and it has a double ending. In the opening shot a long, thin hand reaches down from the top of the screen to leave a flower on a road. A young woman, played by Maya Deren, walks along the road, picks up the flower, and glimpses the back of a figure turning the bend ahead of her.

She goes to the door of a house, knocks, tries the locked door, then takes out her key. She drops it and pursues it as it bounces in slow motion down the stairs. When she finally enters the house, the camera pans a disordered room and ends in a dolly up to the dining room table. There is a loaf of bread, with a knife in it, on top of the table, but as the camera approaches, the knife pops out.

She climbs the stairs, passing a telephone with the receiver off. In the upper bedroom the wind is blowing a curtain. She turns off an unattended record player and returns downstairs to relax in an easy chair by the window. She slowly caresses herself as a shot of her eye and the window are intercut until they are both clouded over. This is the basic movement of the film. In the initial presentation there are no full-figure shots. We see

first the shadow of the protagonist, then her hand picking up the flower. Within the house, the camera moves subjectively, imitating her field of vision and her movements. This is a clear-cut formulation of the idea of first person in cinema. In the initial sequence we only see what the heroine herself sees, including glimpses of her own body.

As this basic movement is repeated the transitions between the variations are fluid, so that the viewer finds himself in the midst of a recurrence before it is expected. The first person switches to third.

From the window in front of the easy chair, we can see the initial setting of the film, the road. Now a black figure, like a nun, with a mirror for a face, walks slowly in the same direction as the young woman had in the beginning. She is followed by the young woman again, who is running after her. As fast as she runs she cannot gain on the walking figure, so she gives up and climbs the stairs to the house. For the first time we see her face. She enters without a key and looks around the room, noticing the knife is now on the stairs where the telephone had been. She climbs up in slow motion, then slowly falls through a black gauze curtain into the bedroom. The phone is on the bed. She pulls down the covers, again revealing the knife, and sees the distorted image of her face reflected in its blade. She quickly pulls back the covers, replaces the receiver on the telephone, and glides backward through the veil down the stairs as the camera does a somersault to dislocate her motions in space. Once downstairs, she sees herself sleeping in an easy chair. With a long stretch she reaches across the room to turn off the phonograph next to her own sleeping figure.

The pace of the events accelerates with each variation. The terror increases as well. After turning off the record player, the second Maya Deren goes to the window from which she sees yet a third version of herself chasing the black figure, who again disappears beyond the bend. She presses her hand against the window and looks wonderingly. The third woman takes her key from her mouth and enters the house where she catches sight of the black figure again. She follows the figure up the stairs and sees it disappear (through stop-motion photography) after placing the flower on the bed. The knife is there too. A quick pan from it brings us back to the sleeper in the easy chair.

This time the camera looks out the window without the mediation of a woman through whose eyes or over whose shoulder the action is seen. We see the same pursuit and its frustrations. Again the key comes from the mouth, but this time it turns immediately into the knife in her hand. She passes through the unlocked door holding it. Within are two Maya Derens seated at the dining room table. She joins them, as a third, placing the key on the table. The first woman feels her own neck, reaches for the key, and holds it in her palm for a moment. The second does the same. The third reaches without feeling her neck; her palm is black; the key turns into the knife when she holds it. Wearing goggles, she rises from the table, holding the knife aggressively. We see her feet step on beach sand, grass,

mud, pavement, the rug—five shots in all. Then, as she is about to stab her sleeping self, the sleeper's eyes open to see a man who is waking her. They go upstairs. Just to reassure herself she glances at the table, which is perfectly in order. The man picks up the flower and puts the phone, which had been left on the stairs, back on its receiver.

Upstairs he lays the flower on the bed and she lies down beside it. His face is reflected in a shaving mirror. He sits next to her and caresses her body. The flower suddenly becomes the knife. She grabs it and stabs him in the face, which turns out to be a mirror. The glass breaks and falls, not to the floor, but on a beach. A wave approaches and touches it.

Without transition we see the same man walking on the original road. He picks up the flower, takes out his key, enters the house, and finds the young woman lying in the easy chair with a slit throat amid broken glass. That is the end.

"This film is concerned," Maya Deren wrote,

> with the interior experiences of an individual. It does not record an event which could be witnessed by other persons. Rather, it reproduces the way in which the sub-conscious of an individual will develop, interpret and elaborate an apparently simple and casual incident into a critical emotional experience. . . .
>
> This film . . . is still based on a strong literary-dramatic line as a core, and rests heavily upon the symbolic value of objects and situations. The very first sequence of the film concerns the incident, but the girl falls asleep and the dream consists of the manipulation of the elements of the incident. Everything which happens in the dream has its basis in a suggestion in the first sequence—the knife, the key, the repetition of stairs, the figure disappearing around the curve of the road. Part of the achievement of this film consists in the manner in which cinematic techniques are employed to give a malevolent vitality to inanimate objects. The film is culminated by a double-ending in which it would seem that the imagined achieved, for her, such force that it became reality.[5]

Until recently commentators on this film have tended to neglect the collaboration of Alexander Hammid, to consider him a technical assistant rather than an author.[6] We should remember that he photographed the whole film. Maya Deren simply pushed the button on the camera for the two scenes in which he appeared. The general fluidity of the camera style, the free movements, and the surrealistic effects, from slow motion to the simultaneous appearance of three Maya Derens in the same shot, are his contribution. If *Meshes of the Afternoon* is, in the words of Parker Tyler, the most important critic of the American avant-garde film in the forties and fifties, "the death of her narcissistic youth," it is also Hammid's portrait of his young wife.

Before he came to America and worked in the documentary tradition, Hammid had made some independent films. His first, *Bezucelna Prochazka (Aimless Walk*, 1930), is particularly relevant here. In that film, a young man observes himself in his daily activities. Hammid, unfamiliar with montage or superimposition techniques in this first film, created the effect of self-observation without montage by having the protagonist quickly run behind the camera and take up another position while the camera was panning between his two selves. His subsequent films display a professional handling of the materials and an awareness of the achievements of the Russian and British documentary schools.

The visual style of *Meshes of the Afternoon* is particularly smooth, with cutting on movements and elisions to extend the continuity of gesture and action. From the very opening, there is a constant alternation of perspectives from synecdochic representation of the action to subjective views of what the protagonist sees, usually through the moving camera. Although the rhetorical figure synecdoche, the part for the whole, is an essential characteristic of all cinema, where the act of framing a picture can bring into play a potential field outside of the frame of which the filmic image is a small part (e.g., any close-up of a part of the body), I refer in this book to the deliberate and extreme use of framing portions of an action as synecdochic. For instance, in the first cycle of *Meshes of the Afternoon*, there is no establishing shot, no view of the whole figure in her environment; toward the middle of the film, as the situation takes on more symbolic dimensions, the camera tends to compensate by stasis and wider views.

The transitions between cycles are subtly achieved. In the first transition between waking and sleeping, the film uses the wavy shadow over both the eye and the window. That sequence is interrupted by a view of the original road, where the black figure is about to appear. But before it does, there is a dolly back from the window, now masked by a cylindrical pipe which emphasizes the transition.

The division between the second and third cycles has the same fluidity. The first shots of the new cycle are cut in before the last of the old one is seen. In this case, after looking at the sleeper, the protagonist goes to the window to see herself running after the black figure. Even after she disappears around the bend and the pursuer begins to climb the stairs, we see another shot of the protagonist in the window, peering out, her hand pressed against the pane.

When we compare the image of Maya Deren, framed by the window where the reflections of trees blend with the mass of her hair, with the parallel image of Pierre Batcheff, sadistically watching the androgyne and the dismembered hand from his window in *Un Chien Andalou*, one contrast between the two films becomes clear. It is, in fact, a difference which obtains between the early American avant-garde "trance film" (as I will call this type of film in general) and its surrealistic precursors. In *Meshes of the Afternoon*, the heroine undertakes an interior quest. She encounters

objects and sights as if they were capable of revealing the erotic mystery of the self. The surrealistic cinema, on the other hand, depends upon the power of film to evoke a mad voyeurism and to imitate the very discontinuity, the horror, and the irrationality of the unconscious. Batcheff, leering out of the window, is an icon of repressed sexual energy. Deren, with her hands lightly pressed against the window pane, embodies the reflective experience, which is emphasized by the consistent imagery of mirrors in the film.

Meshes explicitly simulates the dream experience, first in the transition from waking to sleeping (the shadow covers the eye and the window at the end of the first cycle) and later in an ambiguous scene of waking. The film-makers have observed with accuracy the way in which the events and objects of the day become potent, then transfigured, in dreams as well as the way in which a dreamer may realize that she dreams and may dream that she wakes. They have telescoped the experience of an obsessive, recurrent series of dreams into a single one by substituting variations on the original dream for what would conventionally be complete transitions of subject within a single dream.

In the program notes for a screening of her complete works at the Bleecker Street Theater in 1960, Maya Deren warned, as was her custom, against a psychoanalytical reading of this film: "The intent of this first film, as of the subsequent films, is to create a mythological experience. When it was made, however, there was no anticipation of the general audience and no experience of how the dominant cultural tendency toward personalized psychological interpretation could impede the understanding of the film." Within the film itself, the double ending mitigates against interpretation, showing the makers' preference for sustaining the dream-like ambivalence over the formal neatness of a rounded sleep.

A comparison can be made between this film and *Un Chien Andalou*, while suspending any question of influence. The Deren-Hammid film consciously uses much of what was beyond the intention of Buñuel and Dali. Buñuel and Dali did not set out to create a film dream; the dream-like quality of their work derives from the strength of their sources, from the ferocity with which they dispelled the rational while keeping the structural components of narrative. They show us neither sleep nor waking, but simply a disjunctive, athematic chain of situations with the same characters. The startling changes of place, the violence, the eroticism, the tactility, and above all the consistent use of surrealistic imagery, suggest the dream experience.

Meshes of the Afternoon is not a surrealistic film. It was made possible through a Freudian insight into the processes of the surrealistic film-makers. Nor is it a Freudian film. Surrealism and Freud were the vehicles, either latent or conscious, behind the mechanics of the film. Thus some of its methods seem to derive from *Un Chien Andalou*. In the first place, both films have a "frame" and a double ending. In the case of the Dali-Buñuel film, the frame—the opening sequence of the eye slashing followed by the

(a)

(b)

(a) The window as a repressive barrier in Dali and Bunuel's *Un Chien Andalou*. (b) The window as a reflector of the self in Hammid and Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon*.

title "Eight Years Later" as if a causal flashforward were about to occur—diverts the narrative. The two endings—the beach scene, followed by the title "In the Spring" and a still of the two figures grotesquely buried in the sand—likewise confound our expectations. Deren and Hammid also made imaginative use of the convention of a frame. Had their film ended with the scene of the woman awakened by the man, that frame would have fulfilled the standard function of dividing imagination from actuality. But the continuation of the violence of the dream, and its dislocations, in the scene between man and woman, which is suggestive of waking, then lapsing back into sleep, changes the film's dimension by its affirmation of dream over actuality.

Un Chien Andalou attempts to present us with a broken, violent, spatially and temporally unstable world, without final reference to a more conventional actuality. *Meshes of the Afternoon*, on the other hand, offers us an extended view of a mind in which there is a terrible ambivalence between stable actuality and subconscious violence. Many of the means of presenting this mind are the same as those of the earlier, more radical film. For instance, in *Un Chien Andalou* a door which we expect to open on a corridor opens on a windy beach, just as the broken glass from the mirror in *Meshes* falls not on the floor but on the lip of the ocean. In *Un Chien Andalou*, when the man is shot by a gun, he starts falling inside the apartment and ends in an open field with his hands clawing the back of a naked woman. The transition is smoothly made through the continuity of action. All through *Meshes* there is similar cutting on action across disjunctive spaces.

In the original shooting script for *Un Chien Andalou*, the man who enters the house to chastise the protagonist is his double:

> At that instant the shot goes out of focus. The stranger moves in slow motion and we see that his features are identical

> to those of the first man. They are the same person, except that the stranger is younger, more full of pathos, rather like the man must have been many years earlier.[7]

In the actual production, this identity is obscure. They are not played by the same actor, though their similarity and the dream-like structure of their confrontation do suggest the idea of a double.

This coincidence of the theme of the double can provide us with a clue to the real relationship between the two films. It is possible that neither Hammid nor Deren had seen the Dali-Buñuel film before they made theirs. They could have seen it; and they could have read Dali's book, published just a year before *Meshes*, and learned of it indirectly. If she had seen it, Maya Deren does not mention it in her subsequent writings. In speaking of Surrealism she is not enthusiastic. However, in the construction of the scene in which the stabbed face turns out to be a mirror, they pay homage, perhaps unknowingly, to a motif of the painter René Magritte. In several of his paintings a broken window gapes out upon a void, while the illusory image that one had seen while looking through it lies shattered among the glass on the floor.

In all likelihood Deren and Hammid were more conscious of the influence, however indirect, of Orson Welles's then recent *Citizen Kane*, with its regular shifts of perspective, than of *Un Chien Andalou*. But regardless of the question of influence, it is true that the mechanics of *Un Chien Andalou* and of *Meshes* result from a theoretical application of the principles of cinema to the experience of the dream. The theme of the double, an archetype in dreams, could find two completely different treatments in the two films, yet the abrupt changes of location, so common in dreams, have the same cinematic meaning for both sets of collaborators.

The difference between the films is instructive. *Un Chien Andalou* is filled with metaphors—the eye and the moon, a drink shaker as a doorbell, the sea urchin, and underarm hair—but *Meshes* has none. Objects in the earlier film recur, especially the box of the clown figure, but without the symbolic dimensions of the knife, key, and flower in *Meshes*, which accumulate their deadly charge through repeated use in slightly different circumstances.

Finally, the space of the two films is quite different. *Un Chien Andalou* takes place in a deep space with axial co-ordinates in all four lateral directions and up and down. The virtual space behind doors and walls is much used, as in most surrealistic films. The space projected by *Meshes of the Afternoon* is more rounded and linear, less cubic than the earlier film. There is little movement into or out from the space of the images. Actors tend to move across the screen. There is a sense of depth only when the hand-held camera is moved in the subjective shots.

The articulation of space in avant-garde films is often unconscious. The conscious decisions about movement, fixity of camera, choice of sets, imply an inflection of space that the film-maker is often unaware of. We

The surrealistic shattered image: Hammid in *Meshes of the Afternoon* before and after the knifing of the mirror.

can in fact often observe a common attitude toward space among film-makers who have deliberately tried to distinguish themselves from each other.

A fluid linear space is just one characteristic that this particular film shares with many of the American films which were to follow it. Another is the evocation of the dream state. And a final characteristic of many avant-garde films from this period (most of them trance films as well) is the film-maker's use of herself or himself as a protagonist. There are many reasons for this, and they vary with the film-maker. Obviously, there is a strong autobiographical element in these films. But beyond that, if the film-maker has neither the ability to command amateur actors to do precisely what she or he wants nor the money to hire trained actors, it is logical that she attempt to play the role herself, thus completely eliminating the process of "directing." There is also another, more subtle reason which accounts for the number of self-acted films, particularly at the beginning of the avant-garde film movement in America: film becomes a process of self-realization. Many film-makers seem to have been unable to project the highly personal psychological drama that these films reveal into other characters' minds. They were realizing the themes of their films through making and acting them. These were true psycho-dramas.

As psycho-drama, *Meshes of the Afternoon* is the inward exploration of both Deren and Hammid. The central theme of all the psycho-dramas that marked this stage of the American avant-garde cinema is the quest for sexual identity; in their film, unlike those that follow in this book, it is two people, the makers of the film, who participate in this quest. With the exception of the surrealistic film *Le Sang d'un Poète*, which will be discussed in the next chapter, the avant-garde film of the twenties had no psycho-drama, even in a rudimentary form. The explosion of erotic and irrational imagery that we encounter in many of these earlier films evokes the raw quality of the dream itself, not the mediation of the dreamer.

If we turn from the Dali-Buñuel collaboration to another, but somewhat less successful, example of the period, Man Ray's *Étoile de Mer* (1928), based on a poem by Robert Desnos, there are a number of remarkable coincidences of imagery and structure between it and *Meshes*. Yet the same essential difference of orientation obtains. *Étoile de Mer* opens with the encounter of a man and a woman on a road. They go to the woman's apartment, where she strips and he immediately bids her adieu. Twice again in the course of this elliptical and highly disjunctive film, the same man and woman encounter each other at the same spot. The last meeting might even be a dream, since it immediately follows a scene of her going to sleep.

Then consider the use of the image of the starfish in Man Ray's film. The hero first finds the glass-enclosed creature during his second meeting with the woman. Alone in his room, he contemplates it. Yet during two mysterious and completely unexplained scenes—one in which the woman mounts the stairs of her apartment brandishing a knife, another in which she steps barefoot from her bed onto the pages of a book—the starfish unexpectedly appears in the scene—on the staircase, and next to the bed—like the knife and the telephone of the Deren-Hammid film.

Most of *Étoile de Mer* is photographed through a stippled glass, which distorts its imagery and flattens its space. In the use of this distortion we see the first major difference from *Meshes*. The transitions between distorted and normal views are not psychologically motivated. They appear random, in fact. In *Meshes*, as I pointed out, the wavy field of vision indicated the transition to sleep. Like *Un Chien Andalou, Étoile de Mer* is full of metaphors, many of which are introduced by the titles which Desnos wrote. They are deliberately jarring. After an allusion to "les dents des femmes" we see a shot of the heroine's legs, not her teeth. In the central section of Man Ray's film all action seems to disappear, in order to be replaced by a series of verbal and visual similes comparing the starfish to the lines on the palm of a hand, to glass, and to fire. Narrative itself seems to exist within *Étoile de Mer* only to be fractured or foiled.[8]

The central tradition of the American avant-garde film begins with a dream unfolded within shifting perspectives. Much of the subsequent history of that tradition will move toward a metaphysics of cinematic perspective itself.

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two

Ritual and Nature

THE ELEMENTS OF dream, ritual, dance, and sexual metaphor abound in the avant-garde films made in America in the late 1940s and early 1950s. For a time the dream generated a form of its own, occurring simultaneously in the films of several independent artists. I have called this the trance film. Its history is an extension of the initial discussions of the American avant-garde film in Parker Tyler's book *The Three Faces of the Film*.

In his captions to the illustrations for that volume, Tyler offers a brilliant and succinct analysis of the form and history of the genre. Under a still from Brakhage's *Reflections on Black* he writes:

> The chief imaginative trend among Experimental or avant-garde filmmakers is action as a *dream* and the actor as a *somnambulist*. This film shot employs actual scratching on the reel to convey the magic of seeing while "dreaming awake"; the world in view becomes that of poetic action pure and simple: action without the

> restraints of single level consciousness, everyday reason, and so-called realism.[1]

Then, between stills from *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and *Meshes of the Afternoon*, he writes:

> Cesare, the Somnambulist of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, has been an arch symbol for subsequent avant-garde film-making, one of whose heroines is seen below. Art is the action which knits the passive dreamer, as it knits the passive spectator, to realms of experience beyond his conscious and unconscious control. In such realms, wild excitement is often found by way of the movies. But rarely, except in avant-garde films, does the strict pulse of beauty govern the engines of "wild excitement."[2]

If Cesare is the archetypal protagonist of the trance film, then the form of Jean Cocteau's *Le Sang d'un Poète* is the model for its development. The trance film as it emerged in America has fairly strict boundaries. It deals with visionary experience. Its protagonists are somnambulists, priests, initiates of rituals, and the possessed, whose stylized movements the camera, with its slow and fast motions, can re-create so aptly. The protagonist wanders through a potent environment toward a climactic scene of self-realization. The stages of his progress are often marked by what he sees along his path rather than what he does. The landscapes, both natural and architectural, through which he passes are usually chosen with naïve aesthetic considerations, and they often intensify the texture of the film to the point of emphasizing a specific line of symbolism. It is part of the nature of the trance that the protagonist remains isolated from what he confronts; no interaction of characters is possible in these films. This extremely linear form has several pure examples: Curtis Harrington's *Fragment of Seeking* (1946) and *Picnic* (1948), Gregory Markopoulos's *Swain* (1950), Kenneth Anger's *Fireworks* (1947), Stan Brakhage's *The Way to Shadow Garden* (1955), and Maya Deren's *At Land* (1944), her first film after *Meshes of the Afternoon*. The genre naturally has had many variations, transformations, and mixed uses. These I will discuss later.

At Land is the earliest of the pure American trance films. In it, the heroine, again played by Maya Deren, is washed out of the backward-rolling waves of the sea; she rises, crawls over logs and rocks until she finds herself in the middle of a banquet table, crawls down it without being noticed by the banqueters, and steals a chess figure from a board at the end of the table on which the pieces seem to move by themselves. The middle of the film records her pursuit of the chess man through other similar landscapes: beach, tree, rocks, and interiors. No one seems to notice her. At one point, she loses the chase and finds herself talking with a man who is constantly being replaced by other men. Then, finding another chess game in progress, she steals again. This time, as she flees with the

chess man, she is watched by images of herself from the rocks, the beach, the banquet, and the tree. In a series of dramatic temporal ellipses, she disappears among sand dunes.

Here is the classic trance film: the protagonist who passes invisibly among people; the dramatic landscapes; the climactic confrontation with one's self and one's past. *Meshes of the Afternoon* had some of these elements, but its intricate, coiled form gave a more personal, less archetypal tone to its narrative. The form of *At Land* is completely open. The camera is generally static. This time Hella Heyman photographed and Maya Deren set up the compositions. The principle of the editing, whereby every scene seems magically continuous with the previous, must have been planned in advance. For instance, as the protagonist crawls from the dead tree to the banquet table, we see her head disappear beyond the top of the frame in one scene, and in the next, now in the banquet hall, it rises from the bottom of the frame. As she pulls herself up into the hall, we see a final shot of the tree as her dangling leg passes through the top of the frame. This kind of montage must be provided for in advance, and, in fact, is the basis of the structure of this film.

In *Meshes*, Hammid and Deren had employed a number of montage illusions which created spatial elisions or temporal ellipses for the sake of the psychological reality which informed their vision. In *At Land*, Deren, now on her own, conceives from the beginning that the film should continually use these figures of cinematography as formal or stylistic devices. Indeed, they are essential principles of her film. She says as much in a letter to James Card:

> Anyway, *Meshes* was the point of departure. There is a very, very short sequence in that film—right after the three images of the girl sit around the table and draw the key until it comes up knife—when the girl with the knife rises from the table to go towards the self which is sleeping in the chair. As the girl with the knife rises, there is a close-up of her foot as she begins striding. The first step is in sand (with suggestion of sea behind), the second stride (cut in) is in grass, third is on pavement, and the fourth is on the rug, and then the camera cuts up to her head with the hand with the knife descending towards the sleeping girl. What I meant when I planned that four stride sequence was that you have to come a long way—from the very beginning of time—to kill yourself, like the first life emerging from the primeval waters. Those four strides, in my intention, span all time. Now, I don't think it gets all that across—it's a real big idea if you start thinking about it, and it happens so quickly that all you get is a suggestion of a strange kind of distance traversed . . . which is all right, and as much as the film required there. But the important thing for me is that, as I used to sit there and watch the film when it was projected for friends in

> those early days, that one short sequence always rang a bell or buzzed a buzzer in my head. It was like a crack letting the light of another world gleam through. I kept saying to myself, "The walls of this room are solid except right there. That leads to something. There's a door there leading to something. I've got to get it open because through there I can go through to someplace instead of leaving here by the same way that I came in."[3]

Hammid remembers that the original conception of that scene in *Meshes* was specifically Maya Deren's.

Nevertheless, in her first solo film she is still very much under the influence of her collaborator. The denouement, in which the protagonist is seen by images of herself, comes right out of the center of the earlier film, which may derive from Hammid's own first film. The fluid, rounded space of *Meshes* is echoed in the linear style of *At Land*, with its soft cutting on motion and illusory elisions. But the rich texture of interlocking alternations of subjective camera and synedochic framing of elaborate and dramatic pans, which *Meshes* owed to the creative involvement of Hammid, disappears here, as the photographer worked under the direction of the author-actress.

Trance films in general, and *At Land* in particular, tend to resist specific interpretation. In the case of *At Land*, one could point out the allusions to sexual encounter—the moustached man in bed, and the caressing of the girl's hair by the beach—or interpret the banquet scene in terms of the individual's resistance to the social organism, but it would be difficult to extend such an interpretation to all the actions of the film.

Deren is a good critic of her own work when she writes in her notes for this film:

> The universe was once conceived almost as a vast preserve, landscaped for heroes, plotted to provide them the appropriate adventures. The rules were known and respected, the adversaries honorable, the oracles as articulate and as precise as the directives of a six-lane parkway. Errors of weakness or vanity led, with measured momentum, to the tragedy which resolved everything. Today the rules are ambiguous, the adversary is concealed in aliases, the oracles broadcast a babble of contradictions.
>
> Adventure is no longer reserved for heroes and challengers. The universe itself imposes its challenges upon the meek and the brave indiscriminately. One does not so much act upon such a universe as re-act to its volatile variety. Struggling to preserve, in the midst of such relentless metamorphosis, a constancy of personal identity.[4]

As Maya Deren began to move more confidently from writing to film, her interest in form became clearer. She has left us six films. In each one

of them she explored a new formal option. I have already suggested that her interest in the overlapping of space and time arose as a result of the editing of *Meshes of the Afternoon*. That interest never flagged during her film career. In *At Land* she pursued an open-ended narrative form based on her initial discoveries. In her next film, *A Study in Choreography for Camera* (1945), she returned to her old interest in dance to make a completely new kind of film.

It is clear that even in the first two films her concern with dance was not suppressed. The plastic space of both films, which cutting on motion makes possible, is closely akin to the dancer's art of connecting motions.

Even before her collaboration with Hammid on *Meshes of the Afternoon*, she had spoken casually with dancers about recording ethnic dances on film. After the making of *Meshes* and her revelation that the space and time of film was a *made* space and time, a creative function and not a universal given, she was no longer interested in the camera as a simple recording device for the preservation of dances. *A Study in Choreography for Camera* was a dance film with equal participation by both arts. She subtitled it "Pas de Deux," referring to the one dancer and the one camera.

She did not herself appear in this film. Since she had no formal training, she enlisted the help of a dancer, Talley Beatty, as her one performer. The film they made is extraordinarily simple—a single gesture combining a run, a pirouette, and a leap. It lasts no more than three minutes.

The opening shots recall the climax of *At Land*; in both instances she used one pan movement of the camera to encompass several temporal ellipses. It is as if she were panning through time as well as over space. *At Land* climaxes with one sweeping shot, actually made up of a series of carefully joined shots, of herself walking away over sand dunes. As the camera in its leftward motion sees each successive dune, she crosses over the top and disappears on the other side. Thus in the evocation of a very short time (the time of moving the camera on its tripod) we see the illusions of long periods of time, the walking between dunes having been eliminated.

Choreography begins with a circular pan in a clearing in the woods. In making the one circle the camera periodically passes the dancer; at each encounter he is further along in his slow, up-stretching movement. At the end of this camera movement, he extends his foot out of the frame and brings it down in a different place; this time, inside a room. The dance continues through rooms, woods, and the courtyard of a museum until he begins a pirouette, which changes, without a stopping of the camera, from very slow motion to very fast. Then he leaps, slowly, very slowly, floating through the air, in several rising, then several descending shots, to land in a speculative pose back in the wood clearing.

The dance movement provides a continuity through a space that is severely telescoped and a time that is elongated. The film has a perfection which none of Maya Deren's other films ever achieved.

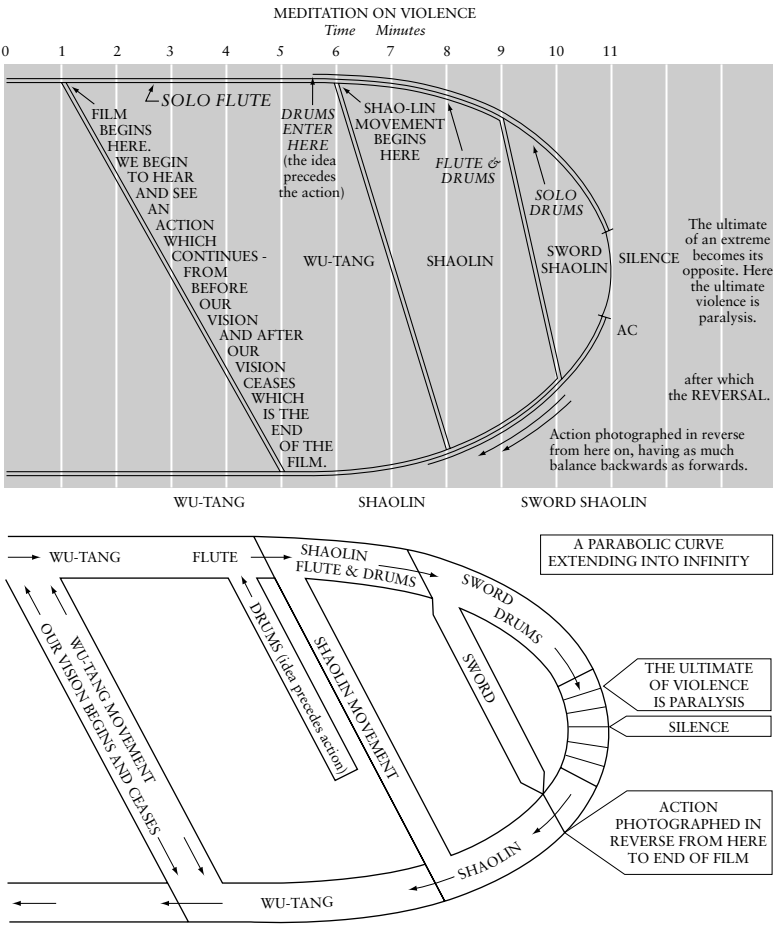
There are two aspects of this film that deserve consideration. One is formal, concerning the emergence of a new way of composing films; the other is synthetic, concerning the possible use of dance in film, and more broadly the problem of prestylization, which Erwin Panofsky, in his essay "Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures" (1934), identified as the failure of all films like *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (his example) which use aesthetic objects such as expressionistically painted sets or ballet movement instead of natural gestures and real scenes as raw material.

Choreography for Camera forecasts the shift from narrative to imagistic structures within the avant-garde film movement. Before it, there had been several ways of putting together such films. Narrative had been the most common. By this I do not mean simple story-telling, but abstracted narrative forms such as *Un Chien Andalou, Meshes of the Afternoon*, and the trance films. Thematic composition was another possibility: the city symphonies, usually describing a day in the life of a city; or tone poems about a season, a place, or a form of matter, such as Steiner's H_2O about water patterns. The sophisticated thematic structures were extended metaphors—one thinks primarily of Léger's *Le Ballet Mécanique*, in which graphic abstraction, repetitive human actions, and machines in operation are synthesized into an image of a gigantic social supermachine.

Maya Deren introduced the possibility of isolating a single gesture as a complete film form. In its concentrated distillation of both the narrative and the thematic principles, this form comes to resemble the movement in poetry called Imagism, and for this reason I have elsewhere called a film using this device an imagist film.[5] There I concentrated on pure examples and described the inevitable inflation of the simple gesture to contain more and more aesthetic matter. Kenneth Anger's *Eaux d'Artifice*, Charles Boultenhouse's *Handwritten*, and Stan Brakhage's *Dog Star Man: Part One* provided the examples.

In brief, all of these films describe a simple action like the leap of *Choreography*. In Anger's film it is the walk of a heroine through a baroque maze of fountains in pursuit of a flickering moth. Boultenhouse's film revolves around the slamming of a fist on a glass tabletop, and Brakhage's describes a man climbing a mountain. Each example represents a progressive stage of inflation, whereby lateral or foreign material is introduced around the essential action without completely disrupting its unity or continuity.

Maya Deren herself returned to the imagist film to make *Meditation on Violence* in 1948, and again just before she died when she conceived the idea of the haiku film. The structure of *Meditation on Violence* almost duplicates that of *Choreography for Camera* on a larger scale, with a proportionate loss of tension. Deren's own notes for the shooting of the film employ two parabolic arcs. Theoretically, the film describes in a single continuous movement three degrees of traditional Chinese boxing—Wu-tang, Shao-lin, and Shao-lin with a sword. A long sequence of the ballet-like, sinuous Wu-tang becomes the more erratic Shao-lin; then for two or


MEDITATION ON VIOLENCE
Time Minutes
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11
SOLO FLUTE
FILM BEGINS HERE. WE BEGIN TO HEAR AND SEE AN ACTION WHICH CONTINUES - FROM BEFORE OUR VISION AND AFTER OUR VISION CEASES WHICH IS THE END OF THE FILM.
DRUMS ENTER HERE (the idea precedes the action)
SHAO-LIN MOVEMENT BEGINS HERE
FLUTE & DRUMS
SOLO DRUMS
WU-TANG
SHAOLIN
SWORD SHAOLIN
SILENCE
AC
The ultimate of an extreme becomes its opposite. Here the ultimate violence is paralysis.
after which the REVERSAL.
Action photographed in reverse from here on, having as much balance backwards as forwards.
WU-TANG
SHAOLIN
SWORD SHAOLIN
WU-TANG
FLUTE
SHAOLIN FLUTE & DRUMS
SWORD DRUMS
SWORD
A PARABOLIC CURVE EXTENDING INTO INFINITY
THE ULTIMATE OF VIOLENCE IS PARALYSIS
SILENCE
ACTION PHOTOGRAPHED IN REVERSE FROM HERE TO END OF FILM
OUR VISION BEGINS AND CEASES
WU-TANG MOVEMENT
DRUMS (idea precedes action)
SHAOLIN MOVEMENT
SHAOLIN
WU-TANG

three minutes in the middle of the film there is an abrupt change to leaping sword movements, in the center of which, at the apogee of the leap, there is a long-held freeze-frame; finally we see the boxer move back through Shao-lin to the original Wu-tang. For each transition there is a change of background and filmic style. We see the Wu-tang against a curved, unbroken black wall; the Shao-lin takes place in a room with alternate black and white walls to emphasize its angularity. The montage, which had been very fluid with elided joining, becomes appropriately pronounced and angular. The sword play occurs outside, with jump cuts, slow motion, and the freeze-frame. The last portion of the film is printed in reverse motion, but the continuity of the movement disguises this from the spectator.

So much for its abstract plan. In the notes for this film, Maya Deren makes some extravagant intellectual claims for it, which are interesting because the film fails to live up to them:

> The film consists not only of photographing these movements, but attempts an equivalent conversion, into filmic terms, of these metaphysical principles. The film begins in the middle of a movement and ends in the middle of a movement, so that the film is a period of vision upon life, with the life continuing before and after, into infinity. The rhythm of the negative-positive breathing is preserved in the rhythm at which the boxer approaches and recedes from the camera. Both the photography and the cutting of the Wu-Tang sections are deliberately smooth and flowing, so that no "striking" shots or abrupt cuts occur in these sections. This whole approach is further amplified in the diagram and notes. Moreover, it seemed significant that not only were these movements related to metaphysical principles (an inner concept) but that they were *training* movements—the self-contained *idea* of violence, not the actual act. Training is a physical meditation on violence. So, too, the film is a meditation. Its location is an inner space, not an outer place. And just as a meditation turns around an idea, goes forward, returns to examine it from another angle, so here the camera, in the WU-TANG section, revolves around the movements of the figure, returns to some previous movement to examine it from another angle altogether, to achieve a "cubism in time."
>
> However, meditations investigate extremes, and life, while ongoing and non-climactic in the infinite sense, contains within it varieties and waves of intensity. So this film, as a meditation, proceeded beyond the WU-TANG School, to examine where the SHAO-LIN concepts of aggression would lead. This school, called "exterior," is based on exterior conditions of opportunity. Its emphasis is upon strength, impact, sudden rhythms, and the body is not treated as a whole. Rather, the sharp strength of the arms and legs is emphasized for independent action. The logical conclusion is to even *implement* this sharpness with a sword. And so, in the film, the increasing violence bursts into an extension: the arm sprouts a sword.
>
> Even this is carried forward. The climax of this meditation on violence is a paralysis. From which point the return is a reversal. The movements are actually photographed in reverse from this point on.[6]

Meditation on Violence, from a theoretical point of view, is a film overloaded by its philosophical burden.

Maya Deren's initial creative period extended from the completion of *Meshes of the Afternoon* in 1943 through the making of *At Land, Choreography for Camera*, and *Ritual in Transfigured Time*, the discussion of which I have postponed for a few pages—three years of almost uninterrupted film production. At the end of that period she published a book of

theory, *An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form, and Film*, and left for Haiti, initially to make a film, but eventually to write her study of Haitian mythology, *Divine Horsemen. Meditation on Violence* was the first film she completed after this period. It bears the full burden of her theoretical and philosophical thought in the intervening years. It suffers, as does her subsequent film, *The Very Eye of Night*, released after a silence of ten years, from excessive stylization, both intellectual and graphical. Yet her aspiration to use film to imitate the process of the mind was exalted and certainly has been felt by other film-makers within the American can avant-garde sphere.

In her program notes she clarifies her attempt to represent mental processes cinematically:

> The camera can create dance, movement and action which transcend geography and take place anywhere and everywhere; it can also, as in this film, be the meditating mind turned inwards upon the idea of movement, and this idea, being an abstraction, takes place nowhere or, as it were, in the very center of space.
>
> There the inner eye meditates upon it at leisure, investigates its possibilities, considers first this aspect and angle, and that one, and once more reconsiders, as one might plumb and examine an image or an idea, turning it over and over in one's mind.[7]

The spectator is confronted with something more restricted than this. There is the boxer, moving before a painfully artificial black wall; then comes a change of boxing style before an equally contrived, angular set of walls, and ultimately, in open space, the boxer is costumed and leaping with a sword. In *Choreography for Camera*, speed was the key to the unity and tension of the image. By elongating the action in *Meditation on Violence*, the fusion of spaces, costumes, boxing modes, and cinematic styles dissolved; it fragmented into vague sections. In principle, such an elongation is not impossible. We shall see later how Stan Brakhage successfully elongated the imagist film in *Dog Star Man: Part One* without losing its essential tension.

In *Ritual in Transfigured Time*, the film which immediately followed *Choreography*, Deren openly grappled with the problem of using dancers in a film. The result is her most complex film, and the one that most fully contains her achievements, her theories, and her failures.

Formally, *Ritual in Transfigured Time* is a radical extension of the trance film in the direction of a more complex form. That form, the architectonic film, which was to emerge in the early 1960s after other ambitious efforts, aspired toward myth and ritual.

The pure trance film has a single protagonist—all other human figures being distinctly background elements—and a linear development. *Ritual* has two principal figures (although ultimately the film reduces itself to the

initiation of a single persona, the female) and utilizes several others more dynamically than does the trance film. Despite the attempt at a continual and gradual movement from trance into dance, *Ritual in Transfigured Time* has three parts: an opening, a party, and a dance in the open air.

The images of this film, unlike any of her others, evoke traditional interpretations. They are not so much symbolic as archetypal, drawn primarily from the visual vocabulary of ancient mythology. The images of Norns, of Fates, and of Graces adorn a film which, in its center, describes a sexual rite of passage. In her notes Maya Deren called this rite the passage of the "widow into bride."

Beyond the classic images, we see the same enigmatic, obsessive totems of her other films. The confrontation of the self takes a new form here. In *Meshes of the Afternoon* we saw, through a camera trick, three simultaneous, juxtaposed images of the heroine in a single shot; in *At Land*, the editing of shots of her looking offscreen, followed by a shot of her in a different location as if filmed from the angle of vision of the previous glance, created the illusion of meeting with the self. Now, here, the self is composed of different bodies; their metamorphosis occurs through cutting on motion. The gesture begun by one is continued by the other. The result is an evocative ambivalence of identity and a sense of mysterious, perpetual metamorphosis.

The form of *Ritual in Transfigured Time* anticipates the even more complex architectonic films of Gregory Markopoulos and Stan Brakhage, in the early sixties, though it lacks their precision of proportions, and their overall evenness of execution. Because of her dedicated interest in form and her reluctance to repeat her previous achievements in that dimension, Deren tended to overextend her formal ambitions at times; as a result she came to cinematic forms earlier than she could handle them well.

Thus her first four films (including *Meshes of the Afternoon*) rehearse in general outline the subsequent evolution of forms within the American avant-garde cinema over the following two decades. Her summary of her achievements in the letter to James Card, previously excerpted, takes on a prophetic tone:

> *Meshes* is, one might say, almost expressionist; it externalizes an inner world to the point where it is confounded with the external one. *At Land* has little to do with the inner world of the protagonist, it externalizes the hidden dynamics of the external world, and here the drama results from the activity of the external world. It is as if I had moved from a concern with the life of a fish, to a concern with the sea which accounts for the character of the fish and its life. And *Ritual* pulls back even further, to a point of view from which the external world itself is but an element in the entire structure and scheme of metamorphosis: the sea itself changes because of the larger changes of the earth. *Ritual* is about the nature and process of change.

> And just as *Choreography* was an effort to isolate and celebrate the principle of the power of movement, which was contained in *At Land*, so I made, after *Ritual*, the film, *Meditation on Violence*, which tried to abstract the principle of ongoing metamorphosis and change which was in *Ritual*.[8]

I will show in this book how the trance film gradually developed into the architectonic, mythopoeic film, with a corresponding shift from Freudian preoccupations to those of Jung; and then how the decline of the mythological film was attended by the simultaneous rise of both the diary and the structural film. The latter are extensions of the imagist form in the direction of visual haiku, epiphanies, and diaries. They are static, epistemologically oriented films in which duration and structure determine, rather than follow, content.

In the opening scene of *Ritual in Transfigured Time*, a woman, played by Maya Deren, stands in a double doorway. She passes from one of the two visible rooms into the other to get a scarf, then returns to the first room with a swatch of yarn. With her head she signals another woman, "the widow," in from the darkness. Like the first woman, the widow is dressed in black, but she is more mournful and she walks with her hand out before her like a somnambulist. She comes in and sits before her, making a ball from her yarn. The first woman, "the invoker," sings, laughs, and chants while she juggles the wool between her hands in gradually slower and slower motion. The widow, hypnotized and enchanted, continues to wind the wool in a ball.

With another turn of her head the invoker indicates that a third woman has entered the room by yet another door. We can call her "the initiator" or "the guide." She beckons the widow while at the same time the invoker hieratically raises her arms, dropping the yarn and thus releasing her from the spell. When the widow looks back, the invoker's chair is empty.

This opening episode is distinguished by compositions-in-depth of more sophistication than anywhere else in Maya Deren's films. A geometrical sense of the relative placement of the three women determines the editing sequence, which is accented by rapid alterations in the speed of recording, causing sudden shifts from slow to normal motion. The composition-in-depth and the handling of a large group of actors in the subsequent scene indicate an advance in Maya Deren's conception of cinematic form and in her powers as a director.

The form of the opening passage is that of the trance film; slow motion was one of its chief cinematic means of expression. In the party scene, the trance is replaced by a collective choreomania, as the entire crowd moves again and again in a half-dozen repetitive patterns; they stop short, suspended in a frozen frame. The means of achieving this effect were simple. Maya Deren printed several copies of a few complex movements, showing the wanderings of the guide, the hesitant movements of the widow, and

the pursuit of her by a young man, who presumably seeks to meet her. Then she simply repeated the very same shots at fixed intervals and punctuated them with the freezes. The result was the highly successful rendering of dance movement from elements outside the dance. It is this middle passage that makes one think that Maya Deren was openly trying to deal with the problem of the prestylization of dance in film, although she never acknowledged the problem as such in her writings.

When the young man meets the widow—they literally "bump into one another"—the scene cuts away to an open field in which the performers are posed, faces just about touching, exactly as they were at the party. They occupy the same portion of the film frame. Thus the transition is sudden and clean, even though the young man is no longer fully dressed but bare-chested, and the widow now has bare legs and feet.

Then they dance. Behind them three female figures from the party, resembling the Graces, dance before neo-classic columns. The guide is one of the Graces. The dance of the couple becomes one of flight and pursuit. As she runs, the widow turns into the invoker, then back again. In the transition there is a change of scarfs, from mourning black to bridal white.

It is the widow again who enters a gate to find her pursuer transformed into a statue on a pedestal. In slow motion with several freeze frames he gradually comes to life, and after some instantaneous petrifications in mid-air, he leaps to the ground. As the pursuit continues, the heroine runs full speed, while the young man follows in graceful ballet leaps in slow motion. Physically, the situation of *Meshes of the Afternoon* is here reversed, as the fleeing runner cannot make gains on the slow-motion pursuer.

They pass by the guide in their chase. Just as he reaches for her, there is a metamorphosis from widow to invoker, and she runs into the sea. As she sinks we see her in negative, her black gown now white while she changes again from invoker to widow, now prepared as a bride for the young man who has not followed her into the water.

Ritual in Transfigured Time is Maya Deren's great effort at synthesis. There is, on the one hand, the transformation of somnambulistic movement to repetitive, cyclic movement; that is, to dance. There is also the fusion of traditional mythological elements—the Graces, Pygmalion, the Fates—with private psycho-drama (the film-maker herself plays the invoker); and an attempt to present a complete ritual in terms of the camera techniques she had utilized in her earlier films—slow motion, freeze-frame, repetition of shots, and variations on continuity of identity and movement.

Its precursor, Jean Cocteau's first film *Le Sang d'un Poète* (1930), bridged a transition from an avant-garde cinema centered in Paris to one dominated by Americans. Of all the independent films from Europe this one had the most influence on those who would revive the avant-garde cinema toward the end of the Second World War. Two aspects of Cocteau's film give it this privileged position: its manifestly reflexive theme, and its ritual. The film opens with an allegory of the relationship of the authorial persona to the temporality of cinematic representation. We see Cocteau,

surrounded by the klieg lights of a movie studio, blocking his face from the camera with a classical dramatic mask, which foreshadows the moment in the film when the film-maker will declare in a handwritten title that he is trapped in his own film; yet what we see of him then is still another mask, this time fashioned after his own profile. The declaration of the enigmatical distance between the authorial self and his mediating persona is coordinated with a bracketing device that affirms that the film transpires in no time, or in the instant between two photograms. We see a towering smokestack begin to crumble, an image reminiscent of many of the Lumières' one-shot films. At the end of the film the smokestack completes its fall. By bracketing his film this way, Cocteau wants the viewer to understand that his mythic ritual occurs in "transfigured time."

The events of *Le Sang d'un Poète* bear a general resemblance to the trance film: a single hero, the poet, finds that the painted mouth he wiped from a canvas continues to live in his hand. It talks to him; it stimulates him sexually as he runs his hand along his body. Finally, with great effort, he transfers the mouth to a statue, which comes alive. The metamorphosis of statue into muse is attended by an alteration of the space in which it occurs; for in this process the door and window of the poet's chamber disappear. His sole exit is through the mirror. So he plunges into a realm of fantastic tableaux which seem to exist solely for his inner education.

The Hôtel des Folies Dramatiques, which the poet explores after crossing the threshold of the mirror, is a series of rooms, accessible only to sight through the keyhole. In each, a principle of cinematic illusionism is illustrated with the naive exuberance of Méliès' films, which Cocteau must have first encountered in his childhood. The assassinated Mexican is revived in reverse motion; camera placement allows us to see a girl clinging to walls and ceiling; finally, a hermaphrodite is constructed of flesh, drawn lines, and a roto-relief in Duchamp's style so that it is not only an illusionary blending of male and female characteristics but a figure synthesized from the very arts which feed into cinematic representation. The myth of the poet that Cocteau elaborates moves freely among centuries and between childhood and maturity.

Back in the chamber, the poet destroys the statue and in so doing is changed into one himself. In the subsequent episode, a group of young students break up the statue to use as fatal ammunition in a snowball fight. Over the bleeding body of a slain student, the muse and the poet, both in the flesh, play a game of cards which culminates, again, in his suicide.

Parker Tyler has pointed out, again in the captions to the illustrations of *The Three Faces of the Film*, the persistence of the motif of the statue within the avant-garde film tradition. Willard Maas, a contemporary of Maya Deren who began making films in 1943 with his wife Marie Menken and the poet George Barker (*Geography of the Body*), invoked this motif on a grand scale in his most ambitious project, *Narcissus* (1956). The hero, played by his collaborator Ben Moore, wanders in desolation through an outdoor corridor formed by two rows of busts of the Roman emperors.

(a)

(a) The cinematic Pygmalion: The poet of Jean Cocteau's *Le Sang d'un Poète* leaves the statue-muse. (b) He peeps through a keyhole in the *Hôtel des folies dramatiques*.

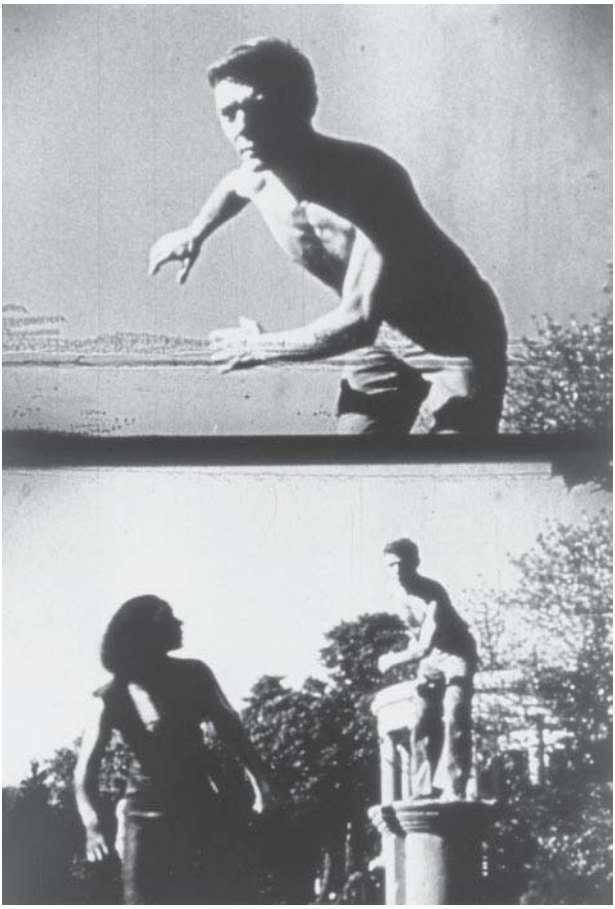
Unlike Cocteau's or Maya Deren's statues, these do not come alive, yet in Maas's film their animation is potential, and the pathos of that fragment of the trance derives from the refusal of the statues to live and advise.

Behind all the employments of the statue in the trance film, however obliquely, is the myth of Pygmalion. In his revival of that myth in the terms of a "magical" illusionism of cinema, Cocteau initiated a cinematic ritual that a whole generation of American film-makers felt sufficiently vital to restate in their own terms.

The temporal ambiguity that Cocteau postulated between any two consecutive frames of a continuous shot operated independent of the camera which photographed that shot. In Maya Deren's reworking of that suspended temporality, account would be taken of the status of the camera in cinematic metaphors of reflection. She did not do this as Vertov had done and as many would begin to do in the 1960s by introducing the film-making apparatus into the imagery of the film. Her early, and best, films dwell instead upon the temporal and spatial complexities of representing the self in cinema. In *Meshes of the Afternoon*, the window, as a metaphor for cinematic representation, has neither the amorphous presence of Man Ray's distorting lens or the barrier quality of the window in *Un Chien Andalou*; it is, rather, a mirror. For Deren, and subsequently for most of the American independent film-makers who followed her, film-making was essentially a reflexive activity.

(b)

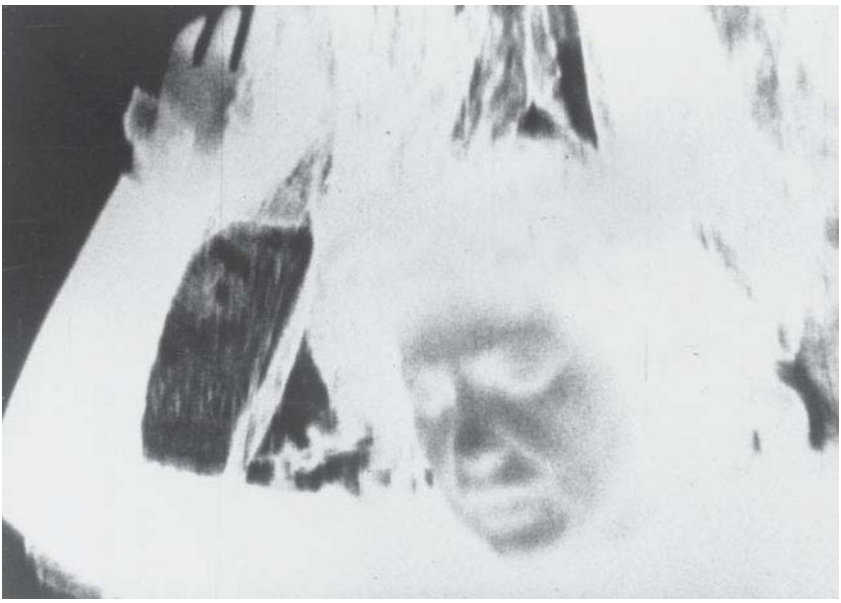
Ritual in Transfigured Time was meant to be first of several cinematic investigations of ritual. In a request for a Guggenheim foundation grant, Maya Deren proposed a complex film correlating the ritual aspect of children's games with traditional rites as they survive in Bali and Haiti. She had enlisted the aid of Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson, whose exhibition and catalogue of South Seas ritual objects at the Museum of Modern Art at that time influenced the conception of the film. In her request for the grant she appended the following chart of ritual parallels and wrote as an example for the project:



The widow of Maya Deren's *Ritual in Transfigured Time* flees the living statue and "marries" the sea, drowning in negative.

> When a child hopes to be given a bicycle for Christmas, it may resolve to walk all the way home from school without stepping on a crack in the sidewalk. Not only is the form of this little ritual completely unrelated to its objective, but that separateness may be frequently reinforced by secrecy: one of the conditions being that no one, and especially the parents, be aware of the performance.[9]

Under the title "Cinematics," she outlined some of the means of achieving her aim, which she had previously stated as "stating the almost fixed constancy of the idea of ritual action":[10]



RITUALS INVOLVING MINIMIZATION OF PERSONAL IDENTITY

(This column descends in degree from highly individual, animate identity to inanimate.)	*Religious* Bali and Haiti	*Secular* (games)
1. *Displacement of performer's identity by another identity and the actions originate rather freely from the assumed character*	Haitian Possession Some Balinese Trances	Animal impersonations Blind man's bluff, etc. Playing house, engineer, etc. Improvised theatricals
2. *Representation of another identity,* with action deriving either from the actual performance or the mask identity or from a play between them	Various masked ceremonies	Masquerades

3. Identity, either original, displaced or represented, subordinated to relatively prescribed action pattern	Communal ceremonies Pre-puberty Balinese trance dancing	Formalized theatricals Group games such as Farmer in the Dell
4. Representational images (X *is* so and so)	Deity Images	Dolls Puppets
5. Manipulation of symbolizations (X *stands for* so and so)	Cabalistic symbols and others Fetish objects	Chess Cards

RITUALS INVOLVING COMPACTS OF BEHAVIOR

(Since the degree of skill is here often critical, the identity of the performer is either retained, or at most on an anonymous or collective level. Where it is greatly minimized, it overlaps with category three of the Identity Rituals.) (The specific work on Bali and Haiti in this connection still remains to be done.)

	Religious	*Secular*
Personal: Ordealistic; Undefined maximum Failure to achieve prescribed degree represents not only a failure of the form, but a critical effect upon the performer	Haitian Ordeals	Acrobatics Gymnastics Follow the Leader
Impersonal: maximum defined within reasonable limits of normal achievement	Simple religious ceremonies, Offerings	Hop-scotch Jump-rope Marbles

In 1946 the Guggenheim Foundation granted her their first fellowship for work in creative motion pictures and she went to Haiti to film rituals and dances. That film was never finished. As late as 1954 she had written that she did not have sufficient footage for a documentary film about Haitian ritual. Presumably, the plan for the cross-sectional ritual film was quickly abandoned. While in Haiti, her career as a film-maker was radically deflected. The film she planned to make became a book about Haitian cults, published as *Divine Horsemen*.

In the preface to her book, she speaks of being "defeated" in her attempt to make the cross-sectional ritual film by the revelation of the mythic integrity of the Haitian cults:

> This disposition of the objects related to my original Haitian project—evidence that this book was written not because I had so intended but inspite of my intentions—is, to me, the most eloquent tribute to the irrefutable reality and impact of Voudoun mythology. I had begun as an artist, as one who would manipulate the elements of a reality into a work of art in the image of my creative integrity; I end by recording, as humbly and accurately as I can, the logics of a reality which had forced me to recognize its integrity, and to abandon my manipulations.[11]

At this time her initial productive spurt had exhausted itself. After returning from Haiti she considered still another ritual film, this time based upon athletic contests. In her search for the appropriate sport, she discovered Chinese boxing, and that inspiration was transformed into *Meditation on Violence*. Apparently she was not content with the film. By the middle of the 1950s she was "getting a real strong itch to re-edit it, shortening it, and this will improve it, I think." She never did.

The film involving children's games and the initial conception of a ritualistic sports film give evidence of the success with which she regarded the central party episode of *Ritual in Transfigured Time*, in which she had raised familiar gestures to the level of ceremony. Throughout the fifties she continued to conceive of films which would choreograph skilled but familiar maneuvers. Each new subject entailed formal evolution. If the film of children's games combined with Balinese and Haitian rituals, even in its speculative form, represented another stage in the evolution of architectonic form, then a film that she was planning to make in 1954 marks an advance over that. In a letter, she describes her idea of a film involving various circus acts:

> Each of the circus acts which occurred to me—the trapeze, the jugglers, the tumblers, the bare-back acts—is composed of sort of suspended TIME phrases. And the form as a whole of the film, which is beginning to emerge, is a kind of series of interlocking time spans—a kind of necklace chain of time-phrases. For example, the tumblers begin their time phrase; about halfway through we are led to the juggler as he begins his time phrase; as the tumblers complete their time phrase we are already in the middle of the juggler's phrase and, before he is finished, we have been started on the aerialists' phrase, which is already carrying us by the time the juggler finishes. Actually it would be constructed somewhat like a singing round, so that once the song is started, it never ends, being always carried forward by successive voices. The idea fascinated me as a concept of structure, and as being able somehow to convey the whole sense of timing which, as I had always felt, and as you re-

> affirmed it, is absolutely basic to all of these activities. Filmically speaking, it means building the whole film in terms of staggered simultaneities.[12]

Here is the first clear hint of the form by which the architectonic or mythopoeic film would emerge—through "staggered simultaneities"—for in the epic films of Markopoulous, Brakhage, and Harry Smith, the narrative pulse, which normally accents temporal development with climaxes and modulates its rhythm by creating scenic components, gives way to a sense of simultaneity, over which a broad narrative development may, or may not, occur.

The ironies of Maya Deren's later career are almost tragic. Before her death in 1961, she completed only one more film, *The Very Eye of Night*. It does not aspire to the same formal innovations as the projected outlines from which I have quoted; her concern was with plastic development, conflict of scale, and dimensional illusion rather than with total structure.

The most pointed irony concerns the circumstances of her death. At the turn of the decade she was living on a pittance from the Creative Film Foundation in return for her energetic work as its secretary (it was a one-person operation, with nominal officers) and on her husband Teiji Ito's income as an enlisted private in the army. Just before his discharge, the death of a relative raised hopes of an inheritance for Ito. After a disappointing meeting concerning this inheritance, Maya Deren came down with a terrific headache which led to a paralyzing seizure the next day. Within a week she had suffered her third cerebral hemorrhage and died after three days in a coma. Not long after that the elusive inheritance came through.

She died before she could see the fruit of her work as an apologist and propagandist for the avant-garde film. Yet friends who remember her rages qualify this last irony; she might have found more to oppose than to acclaim in the explosion of film-making and theorizing of the 1960s.

Nevertheless, despite some grievances and voodoo curses against her fellow avant-garde film-makers, Maya Deren worked hard to better the position of the independent film artist and to further the cause of what she called the "creative film" in general. That effort is an important aspect of the visionary tradition within the American avant-garde film. Not only have there been artists making films in the spiritual wake of Poe, Melville, Emerson, Whitman, and Dickinson; there has been a movement among these artists to advance the cause of cinema in general. Such unions have been part of all the arts in this century. This is true, especially in the United States, where a literary tradition grew out of next to nothing in the last century and where a new tradition in the plastic arts was forged. Yet one would be at a loss to discover among painters or writers, dramatists or dancers, an effort as intense or as sustained as that made by independent film-makers for the security of their art. There are obvious reasons for this: the medium is very expensive; its aspirants were relatively few in number

until the 1960s; and success in independent film-making is considerably less rewarded than in painting, writing, or drama.

Maya Deren's vision of a better situation for the film-maker developed out of her experiences as a lecturer and theorist of the medium. In the latter capacity, she has left, in addition to the illuminating notes and articles on her completed films, a coherent body of theoretical writings. They include relatively technical essays for amateur trade publications—"Efficient or Effective," "Creating Movies with a New Dimension," "Creative Cutting," "Adventures in Creative Film Making," two widely circulated essays on the possibilities of the cinema, "Cinema as an Art Form" and "Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality," and a pamphlet, written as early as 1946 and published privately by the Alicat Book Shop in Yonkers, New York, *An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form, and Film*. Just before her death, she did a number of guest columns for Jonas Mekas in the *Village Voice* which assume a more critical than theoretical stance. The technical articles are essentially autobiographical and offer encouragement to amateurs without money or expensive equipment. They reaffirm the principles of the more general essays without amplifying them.

The basic tenets of her theories can be simply stated. She takes for granted the indexical relationship between reality and the photographic image. In each of her three major articles she insists upon grounding the cinema in photographic realism. Perhaps her experience as a still photographer (she did portraits for *Vogue, Harper's Bazaar, Mademoiselle*, and several art magazines) prejudiced her against photographic distortions.

She analyzed the two functions of the film camera as "discovery" and "invention," the former referring to visions of space and time beyond the capabilities of the human eye, including telescopic or microscopic cinematography on the one hand and slow motion, freeze-frame, or time lapse photography on the other. Among these methods she would continually admit her predilection for slow motion. As an instrument of "invention," the camera records imaginative constructs in reality and reconstructs them through the illusions of editing. She insists on the principle of recognition rather than graphic composition within the photographic image:

> In a photograph, then, we begin by recognizing a reality, and our attendant knowledges and attitudes are brought into play; only then does the aspect become meaningful in reference to it. The abstract shadow shape in a night scene is not understood at all until revealed and identified as a person; the bright red shape on a pale ground which might, in an abstract, graphic context, communicate a sense of gaiety, conveys something altogether different when recognized as a wound. As we watch a film, the continuous act of recognition in which we are involved is like a strip of memory unrolling beneath the images of the film itself, to form the invisible underlayer of an implicit double exposure.[13]

The elemental authority of the photographic image lends reality even to the most artificial events recorded by it.

A series of lectures she gave at a Woodstock, New York, summer workshop in 1959 (she was beginning to work on her haiku-inspired film then) began with the polemical statement, "Art must be artificial." Her emphasis then, as always before, was on form. Twelve years earlier she had defined form:

> Art is distinguished from other human activities and expression by this organic function of form in the projection of imaginative experience into reality. This function of form is characterized by two essential qualities: first, that it incorporates in itself the philosophy and emotions which relate to the experience which is being projected; and second, that it derives from the instrument by which that projection is accomplished.[14]

She finds it highly significant that the age which produced the theory of relativity produced in the film camera an instrument capable of synthetic constructions across space and time. Speaking of "the twentieth century art form" in her last theoretical essay, she raises a concluding question and answers it:

> How can we justify the fact that it is the art instrument, among all that fraternity of twentieth-century inventions, which is still the least explored and exploited; and that it is the artist—of whom, traditionally, the culture expects the most prophetic and visionary statements—who is the most laggard in recognizing that the formal and philosophical concepts of his age are implicit in the actual structure of his instrument and the techniques of his medium?
>
> If cinema is to take its place beside the others as a full-fledged art form, it must cease merely to record realities that owe nothing of their actual existence to the film instrument. Instead, it must create a total experience so much out of the very nature of the instrument as to be inseparable from its means.[15]

Her major essays all take shape through a series of negative reductions; she rejects the graphic cinema and animation for their refusal to accept the reality of the photographic image and for their use of painterly forms in film; she criticizes the documentary for its exclusion of the imagination and its passive dependence on accidental phenomena; and she calls the narrative cinema to task for its imitation of literary modes.

Nevertheless in each of these highly exclusionary essays, the dance creeps in as an acceptable part of cinematic synthesis. In "Cinema as an Art Form," she makes this parenthetical observation:

> (Dance, for example, which, of all art forms would seem to profit most by cinematic treatment, actually suffers miserably. The more successful it is as a theatrical expression, conceived in terms of a stable, stage-front audience, the more its carefully wrought choreographic patterns suffer from the restiveness of a camera which bobs about in the wings, onstage for a close-up, etc. . . . There is a potential filmic dance form, in which the choreography and movements would be designed, precisely, for the mobility and other attributes of the camera, but this, too, requires an independence from theatrical dance conceptions.)[16]

The longest and most interesting of her theoretical writings is the densest, *An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form, and Film*. Even the form of the book reflects her obsession with structures; here she brings together her views on science, anthropology, metaphysics, and religion with the attacks on the conventional modes of film-making which I observed in her other writings. In trying to define an aesthetic and ethical worldview, she launches into an attack upon Surrealism, which she finds as deficient as realism in providing images of human consciousness. "Consciousness" is her key word in this essay, and she approaches it historically, claiming that a fundamental change in human mentality took place around the seventeenth century. "In the course of displacing deity-consciousness as the motive power of reality, by a concept of logical causation, man inevitably relocated himself in terms of the new scheme," she wrote in the opening section.

The Surrealists, according to her, hark back to a world before this absolute change.

> Their "art" is dedicated to the manifestations of an organism which antecedes all consciousness. It is not even merely primitive; it is primeval. But even in this effort, man the scientist has, through the exercise of rational faculties, become more competent than the modern artist. That which the sur-realists labor and sweat to achieve, and end by only simulating, can be accomplished in full reality, by the atom bomb.[17]

She would have us bear in mind that the classicism of the early eighteenth century was a function of the shift from an absolute to a human ideal in the previous century. Furthermore she considers the psychological orientation and the cult of personality in contemporary art to be a degeneration from this successful period.

There is some discrepancy between her theory and her films. In the preface to the *Anagram*, she warns us of the danger of expecting a perfect continuity between them:

> In my case I have found it necessary, each time, to ignore any of my previous statements. After the first film was com-

> pleted, when someone asked me to define the principle which it embodied, I answered that the function of film, like that of other art forms, was to create experience—in this case a semi-psychological reality. But the actual creation of the second film caused me to subsequently answer a similar question with an entirely different emphasis. This time that reality must exploit the capacity of film to manipulate Time and Space. By the end of the third film, I had again shifted the emphasis—insisting this time on a filmically visual integrity, which would create a dramatic necessity of itself, rather than be dependent upon or derive from an underlying dramatic development. Now, on the basis of the fourth, I feel that all the other elements must be retained, but that special attention must be given to the creative possibilities of Time, and that the form as a whole should be ritualistic (as I define this later in the essay). I believe of course that some kind of development has taken place; and I feel that one symptom of the continuation of such a development would be that the actual creation of each film would not so much illustrate previous conclusions as it would necessitate new ones—and thus the theory would remain dynamic and volatile.[18]

Her intense rejection of the cult of the personality, of the psychoanalytic approach to art, and of explicit symbolism ignores the privacy of the sources of *Meshes of the Afternoon, At Land*, and *Ritual in Transfigured Time*. That intimacy, which her films share with the painting of their time, although they share little else, is to their credit. When she moved further from the powerful element of psycho-drama, in *Meditation on Violence* and much later in *The Very Eye of Night*, her art diminished.

In the text she distinguished between imagery and symbolism:

> When an image induces a generalization and gives rise to an emotion or idea, it bears towards that emotion or idea the same relationship which an exemplary demonstration bears to some chemical principle; and that is entirely different from the relationship between that principle and the written chemical formula by which it is symbolized. *In the first case the principle functions actively; in the second case its action is symbolically described in lieu of the action itself*. An understanding of this distinction seems to me to be of primary importance.[19]

But she interpreted imagery very literally if she could describe the footsteps on water, grass, pavement, and rug of *Meshes of the Afternoon* in this way: "What I meant when I planned that four stride sequence was that you have to come a long way—from the very beginning of time—to kill yourself, like life first emerging from primeval waters."[20]

She makes an interesting connection between the quality of classical art and ritualistic form:

> The romantic and the sur-realist differ only in the degree of their naturalism. But between naturalism and the formal character of primitive, oriental and Greek art there is a vast ideological distance. For want of a better term which can refer to the quality which the art forms of various civilizations have in common, I suggest the word ritualistic. I am profoundly aware of the dangers in the use of this term, and of the misunderstandings which may arise, but I fail, at the moment, to find a better word. Its primary weakness is that, in strictly anthropological usage, it refers to an activity of a primitive society which has certain specific conditions: a ritual is anonymously evolved; it functions as an obligatory tradition; and finally, it has a specific magical purpose. None of these three conditions apply, for example, to Greek tragedy.[21]

> The ritualistic form reflects also the conviction that such ideas are best advanced when they are abstracted from the immediate conditions of reality and incorporated into a contrived, created whole, stylized in terms of the utmost effectiveness.[22]

> Above all, the ritualistic form treats the human being not as the source of the dramatic action, but as a somewhat depersonalized element in a dramatic whole.[23]

In several other places Maya Deren refers to her art as "classical" and to her films as "classicist," yet there is little to justify this description in her works unless it is the conservative quality of the dance movements or the occasional references to Greek myth.

Classicists looked on the arts of Greece and Rome as paradigms of logical and moral order. The revision of this perspective resulted from a late Romantic investigation of Greek irrationality, initiated by Friedrich Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* (1871), which affirmed the primitive and ritualistic elements in all the arts, using Greek tragedy as the pivotal example. In calling her art "classical," Maya Deren seems to have wanted to point out the chastening of Dionysian elements in her employment of ritual. She also seems to have perceived that the American art of her time in painting, poetry, and potentially in film was deeply committed to an elaboration of its Romantic origins. By calling herself a classicist she was trying to disassociate her work from the excess of that tendency. The disassociation was never complete, nor did she want it to be. What she could not know was that in its future evolution the American avant-garde film would plunge into a dialogue with the major issues of Romantic thought and art and that the mythic inwardness of her early films would be used as springboards for that plunge.

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The Potted Psalm

THERE HAVE BEEN MANY collaborations in the history of the radical cinema. Before Maya Deren and Alexander Hammid made *Meshes of the Afternoon*, Dali and Buñuel had collaborated, as had James Sibley Watson and Melville Webber on *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1928) and *Lot in Sodom* (1933). René Clair, Francis Picabia, and Erik Satie joined forces to make *Entr'Acte*, which I shall discuss shortly. Film-making has been, and remains most often, a group activity, with specialized divisions of labor. It is not an extraordinary situation, then, when artists from other media, complaining of the poverty of imagination in existing films, set out together to make a virgin attack on the cinema. And it often happens that a writer or painter works with someone who already knows the mechanics of the camera and the editing machine.

At the end of the Second World War, film was a potentially fertile field for American visionaries. Maya Deren had made her first films, although few people were aware of them until late in the forties when she had begun to lecture and the

two great film societies, Cinema 16 in New York and Art in Cinema in San Francisco, had been formed and showed them. It was possible, however, to see "the boiler plate of the Museum of Modern Art," as Sidney Peterson called the widely distributed prints of *Potemkin, Un Chien Andalou, Entr'Acte, Symphonie Diagonale, Rhythmus 21*, and the numerous other classic films available from New York. These works opened up the area of cinema without establishing a constricting tradition for the artists who saw them.

When Peterson himself began to make films, he was fully conscious of the strategies of Buñuel and Dali. He applied them to his own situation. When he met the poet and playwright James Broughton, they agreed to collaborate on a play. They worked out an outline and began to write the dialogue together (it was to have been about John Sutter's old age) when the project shifted into film. The play and its ideas were abandoned.

Peterson had shot some footage with a friend on a camping trip and had assembled it in his living room. This gave him sufficient knowledge of the mechanics to dare a more ambitious film. A discussion in Peterson's house one evening in 1946 initiated the film. Four people were there, including Broughton and Peterson. One owned a small film company, another had some money. They decided to begin a film rather than just talk about one.

It was not long before the angel, unhappy in the role of sponsor, withdrew. The man with the film company lent equipment but stayed out of the project. With no money, they could only shoot one reel of film at a time. That meant one hundred feet—or about three minutes of film—during each session. Thus the shooting, spread out over three months, was highly discontinuous. That discontinuity was accented by the disappearance of the young man they had chosen as their protagonist.

Unlike Maya Deren, Peterson and Broughton preferred to use their friends as actors in their first films, not themselves. In their choice of a leading player they followed a tactic of *Un Chien Andalou* by selecting a type who projected a quality of madness. Shortly after the completion of the Dali-Buñuel film, Pierre Batcheff killed himself; not too long after that, the leading lady also killed herself. In the case of *The Potted Psalm*, Harry Honig simply disappeared after one shooting session. The rest of the film had to deal with this contingency.

From the reports of both creators, the collaboration went smoothly.[1] Peterson operated the camera, and they both agreed on the choice of shots. When it came to the editing, they worked together "over one another's shoulders" according to Peterson.

When the film was first shown during the initial season of Art in Cinema, Peterson wrote the following note:

> *The Potted Psalm* was shot during the summer of 1946. The original scenario and shooting script were discarded on the first

day. Thereafter fresh scenarios and scripts were prepared at least once a week for a period of about three months. The surviving film was cut into 148 parts and the parts numbered—one to one forty-eight. The scenarios then read like stock market reports.

This pullulation of literary material, finally taking a numerical form, was deliberate. What was already literary had no need to become cinematic. The resulting procedure corresponded to the making of a sketch in which, after an enormous preliminary labor of simplification, the essential forms are developed in accordance with the requirements of a specific medium.

The necessary ambiguity of the specific image is the starting point. From a field of dry grass to the city, to the grave stone marked "Mother" and made specific by the accident ("objective hazard") of a crawling caterpillar, to the form of a spiral, thence to a tattered palm and a bust of a male on a tomb, the camera, after a series of movements parodic of the sign of the cross, fastens on the profile of a young man looking into a store window. All these scenes are susceptible of a dozen different interpretations based on visual connections. The restatement of shapes serves the general purpose of increasing the meanings of the initial statements. The connections may or may not be rational. In an intentionally realistic work the question of rationality is not a consideration. What is being stated has its roots in myth and strives through the chaos of commonplace data toward the kind of inconstant allegory which is the only substitute for myth in a world too lacking in such symbolic formulations. And the statement itself is at least as important as what is being stated. The quality, for example, of rectangularity in the maternal tomb is a primary consideration. Psychologically it constitutes a negation of the uterine principle. Aesthetically it derives its force from what has been called the geometric as opposed to the biologic spirit. The definition and unification of these opposing spirits is one of the functions of a visual work. Nor is it necessary for an audience to analyze these functions. It is enough to know that they exist. At least they may be presumed to exist. Having made the assumption, it is possible to go on from there.

Unfortunately, where we go is by no means certain. The replacement of observation by intuition in a work of art, of analysis by synthesis and of reality by symbolism, do not constitute a roadmap. It is perhaps wanting too much of art to expect it to perform the kinds of miracles ordinarily demanded of world statesmen. Not a roadmap possibly but the beginnings of a method. A method of statement, in a medium sufficiently fluid to resolve both the myth and the allegory in a complete affirmation.[2]

By design and by necessity *The Potted Psalm* evolves disjunctively; the various women of the film (there are six in the credits) form a virtually continuous spectrum from innocent girl to savage old lady, but at any given moment of the film it is difficult to tell the middle figures apart; the mixture of motifs and styles, which in later films are typical of either Peterson or Broughton, makes it difficult to bring the film into focus as a totality.

The overall plan is quite straightforward; a graveyard episode is followed by an interior scene and ends again outdoors near the graveyard. Brief exterior scenes punctuate the middle sections. At times the film seems to proceed narratively, though with radical ellipses, and at times it seems to be a thematic construction, cutting away from narrative time. The themes of schizophrenia and the bifurcated male, in addition to being an obsession of Peterson's, fit the fact of the collaboration and its helter-skelter method.

The film opens with a pan from deep weeds to a hilltop view of San Francisco. We are immediately confronted with a metaphor which determines much of the movement and montage of the film. Ever since this film, San Francisco has inspired avant-garde film-makers to portray it as a paradise of fools. Peterson himself, turned writer, spent a decade on a book about the philosophy and eccentricity of the city itself.

From the weeds, the camera sweeps sideways over a grave marked "Mother" while a snail or caterpillar creeps one way as the camera moves in the opposite direction. The camera settles on the granite head of a man carved on a gravestone. A cut shows us the protagonist's face in a similar profile; his pimples are highlighted. His face twitches. Throughout this film almost everything else twitches—feet, thumbs, eyes—in a spasmic response to spastic construction.

He stands before a shop. When he looks in the window he sees, amid collected junk, a nude female figure, the first indication of the theme of adolescent sexuality which pervades the film. Shortly he makes his way to a house which might be a madhouse or a bordello, or both. Inside he undergoes a metamorphosis into a headless man in a navy jacket. There he sees an old lady eating the leaves of a plant; when he lifts the skirt of another woman seated beside him, he finds she has a carved table leg; later both her legs are of flesh, but the foot of one is stuck in a glass beaker.

Intercutting between this interior and the grave suggests that these madwomen or whores might be ghouls or that their house might open into the realm of death. Once he is inside, narrative causality disappears. The headless man pours a drink down his neck. In a closeup, someone picks at a plate of broken glass with a knife and fork. From the perspective of the subjective camera, a drink is drunk and a cigarette smoked as if the camera itself were consuming them. Other women appear and dance with the camera, which may stand in for the protagonist, and with a reflecting tube wearing a hat. One of the women kisses an anamorphic mirror. From that point onward, distorted and reflected images increase in frequency.

The twitching, scratching, tongue flicking, and dancing accelerate as well. Eventually he flees from the house, and the semblance of narrative begins again.

Violence dominates the next images. The mannequin is broken and bloody. The hero, at times headless and at times the pimply youth, takes up a knife, kicks away the dead carcass, and cuts through meat, but only a snail falls away. Now we are back at the scene of the film's opening, by "Mother's" grave. From here a woman runs away in slow motion. The camera follows her, superimposing several images of her flight. The speed changes from very slow to very fast. Then, when she passes over a hill, the film ends.

In their subsequent films Peterson and Broughton draw heavily on the experience and material of *The Potted Psalm*, but with more successful formal organization. Perhaps that film, which was made on a lark, might have been its makers' last were it not for its success at the opening season of the Art in Cinema film society. As a result of the near riot at its opening, Douglas MacAgy, then the director of the California School of Fine Arts, conceived the idea of including avant-garde film-making in the curriculum of his school.

At the end of the war the students of the art school, somewhat older than usual, tended to be more proficient than inspired. The film-making course offered more involvement in the experience of art-making. Peterson was hired to teach it. Each of the students paid a small fee for materials and to finance their collective film. Peterson used the situation with consummate skill to pursue his film-making. The films he made between 1947 and 1949, *The Cage, The Petrified Dog, Mr. Frenhofer and the Minotaur*, and *The Lead Shoes* were all workshop projects. In each of them the students acted, constructed sets, or supplied the basic themes.

The evolution of the first of these films, *The Cage* (1947), shows the vicissitudes of the situation in which Peterson found himself, but also his ability to turn it into an aesthetic triumph. To begin with, he engaged his friend Hy Hirsch as a cameraman. Hirsch had not yet made any of his own films, but he had experience with a motion picture camera, access to equipment, and a sincere interest in the project. Peterson decided not to operate the camera himself because he had to lecture while he was in the process of making the film.

Peterson's talent lies in synthesizing. He begins with a few themes and a few stylistic principles. The film then emerges spontaneously. He shoots with the idea in mind that the structural cohesion of film comes in the editing. Looking at the whole of his work, we can see how he challenges his own aesthetic by providing himself with radically different components to synthesize. This becomes more obvious in the later films.

The Cage begins with a picaresque theme, the adventures of a loose eyeball. This was to be filmed "with every trick in the book and a few that weren't." He used all the camera times: slow, fast, normal, and reverse. Superimposition and stop-motion disappearances are employed. To

these he added a few tricks of his own, such as a cut-out collage which moves to reveal the actual scene or the counterpoint of forward and backward motions (he filmed his actors running backward through a crowd and had the film reversed so the crowd runs backward and the actors forward).

He chose the student with the maddest expression as the protagonist. He could not have been very surprised, after the making of *The Potted Psalm*, when this schizophrenic-looking young man dropped out of school and deserted the film midway through shooting. Peterson employed the same tactic he had earlier: find a double and deflect the theme of the film. This time he could do it with more control.

He already had a shot of the first young man sitting on a chair, bent over thinking, with a patch on his eye. He put his new hero in the same position and then he dissolved the two shots within the camera, so that one blends into the other. A concave anamorphic image shows the two fusing together (achieved by joining two different images at the point of maximal distortion so that the clear image of the first blurs, and out of the blur comes the second). When, later, the second man wears the patch, the transfer is complete.

The construction of the film is so continuous that, unless told by the film-maker, the viewer could not guess that the film did not proceed completely according to plan. In its final version *The Cage* describes the adventures of a "mad" artist. In a symbolic or real self-mutilation, he takes out his own eye, which immediately escapes from his studio into an open field and then meanders through San Francisco. His blinding is accompanied by complete schizophrenia. He alternates with his double throughout the film.

His girlfriend, who is also his model, frightened by his mad groping around his studio for the lost eye, gets a doctor. The girl, the doctor, and one of the two protagonists then chase around the city after the eye. Throughout the film the perspective alternates between that of the pursuers and that of the eye itself. The eye's vision is filmed through an anamorphic lens.

The strategy of the doctor is to catch the eye and destroy it. To save the eye, the double continually has to thwart the doctor's attacks with darts and rifles. Eventually the eye is recovered, and the schizophrenic becomes the original young man. His first act as a reunited man is to knock out the doctor who otherwise would have ruined his recovery and, presumably, taken the girl.

In a deliberately parodic ending, the artist and girl walk off hand in hand. He embraces her in a field, and she flies out of his arms into a tree.

As the comparison of outlines would suggest, *The Cage* develops much of the material rehearsed in *The Potted Psalm*. At times the imagery coincides. We see a snail crawling over the eyeball, just as we had seen one repeatedly in the earlier film. In *The Potted Psalm*, the carcass, the eating of glass, and the cutting through meat function as visual jolts. They are

reminiscent of the sliced eye in *Un Chien Andalou*. In *The Cage* the tactile horror is greater, though still not on a level with the Dali-Buñuel film.

The snail crawling over the eye; the eye rolling in the mouth of a sleeping man, or onto the hatpin of a shoplifter; the eye caught in a wet mop; these are all images that create a virtually tactile response. The most vivid of them, the hatpin, fuses horror and humor in the best surrealistic style.

The Cage also has within it a mad "city symphony" of San Francisco as seen from the rolling eye. When Peterson eventually gave up film-making and concentrated on writing, he published his novel, *A Fly in the Pigment*, elaborating on the picaresque adventures of the eyeball in *The Cage*. In the novel a fly escapes from a Dutch flower painting in the Louvre and explores the human comedy of Paris before dying by being accidentally slammed between the pages of a book.

The images and movements of the camera we see in *The Cage* are Peterson's. Hy Hirsch executed them well, kept the focus, and balanced the darks and lights. There is nothing in the dozen later Hirsch films like the camera work of *The Cage*; it recurs in all of Peterson's work.

To begin with, there is the anamorphosis, the lateral and vertical distortion of images emphasized by a twisting movement of the lens which shifts the axis of contraction and elongation. The distortions of *The Potted Psalm* seem to have been done with a mirror or a crude mask over the lens. With *The Cage* and thereafter, Peterson uses an optically distorting lens. The device is simple and had been attacked as too "easy," yet Peterson used it more intelligently and creatively than any of the numerous other film-makers who have tried before and after him. In his films the anamorphic lens opens an Abstract Expressionist space. Even though structurally he related anamorphosis to various forms of madness, his distorting lens offers an alternative to haptic perspectives.

In *The Cage* the distorted imagery clearly represents the perspective of the liberated eye. After the eye is dislodged, it remains for a while in the room. The protagonist chases after it while all the furniture flies over and at him in slow motion. Peterson skillfully pivots the camera in a circular movement. The flying furniture and the spinning camera are intercut and subvert our gravitational orientation. The episode ends, effectively, with a reverse motion shot of the flying furniture as the floor and the eye are mopped up. The illusion makes the fallen chairs, tables, easel, and so on return to their places through the action of the mop.

Peterson attempted so many things that the film is much more interesting than it is successful. Yet where it is successful, as in the dialogue of perspectives and their spaces, it is breaking new ground for a subjectivist cinema. It is specifically his use of radical techniques as metaphors for perception and consciousness (which is intimately bound up with the Romantic theme of the divided man) that elaborates upon Deren's central contribution and paves the way for future refinements of cinematic perspective in the avant-grade.

There is a section in the film where the dialectic is especially effective. Just after the eyeball floats out the window, there is a shot of the girl sleeping on the couch in the studio, fully dressed, with the doctor's foot by her head. The double of the hero lifts his patch and we see, presumably, what he perceives: his alter ego rushing through the streets of San Francisco with a cage over his head. The people of the city all walk backwards; the cars too run backwards. Then the shot of the sleeping girl returns.

This small episode attracts our attention because of its ambiguity. In the first place, it suggests a dream; what follows, or perhaps the whole film, might be the vision of the girl's afternoon sleep, as in *Meshes of the Afternoon*. Then, within the dream, comes the set of shots which suggests that the episode is the interior reflection of the double.

The bird cage which gives the film its title appears first just after the dissolve connecting the double protagonist. The first is wearing it over his head. From then on, until he is made whole again and his caged self is buried in the sand on a beach (reverse motion), he wears it as a symbol of his schizophrenia. Obviously these scenes were shot before the theme of the alter ego entered the film, since it is the actor who disappeared who wears the cage. The specific use of the symbolism is simply a result of the film's ultimate construction. Here then is the clearest example of the process of film creation that Peterson described in his note to *The Potted Psalm*.

The second appearance of the cage comes at the end of a wild camera movement during the first scramble after the rolling eye when the cage lands on the head of a statue, that persistent archetype of the early avant-garde film. The statue emerges in the most ambitious subjectivist films as a desperate surrogate for basic human needs.

A discussion of *The Cage* would not be complete without referring to *Entr'Acte* (1924), the exemplary film of the Dada movement. *Entr'Acte* stands in the same relationship to *The Potted Psalm* and *The Cage* as *Un Chien Andalou* does to *Meshes of the Afternoon*. Its conception resembles that of Peterson's collaboration with Broughton; as a finished film, it is more like his first solitary exercise. The ways that they differ point up the differences between the American avant-garde film of the 1940s and the French of the 1920s.

Entr'Acte was made to be shown between the acts of a ballet, called *Relâche*, or *No Show Today*. The negative titling was the work of Francis Picabia, the Dadaist painter, who wrote the film scenario and made the sets for the ballet itself; Erik Satie provided music for both. When he decided that the performance should have a filmed curtain raiser and a movie intermission, the task of production was given to René Clair.

Clair modestly describes the circumstances: "When I met him he explained to me that he wanted to show a film between the two acts of his ballet, as had been done, before 1914, during the intermissions of café concerts. And since I was the only one in the house involved with the cinema, I was called upon."[3] There is no reason to doubt him. For Picabia the film was a casual affair. He jotted down the most schematic of sce-

The cage as an icon of the discontinuity of the self: Sidney Peterson's *The Cage*; Anais Nin in Kenneth Anger's *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome*.

narios on stationery from Maxim's. One can imagine him writing as he finished his coffee:

> At the rising of the curtain: cannon charges in slow motion performed by Satie and Picabia; the shot will have to make as much noise as possible. Length: 1 minute.

During the intermission:

1. Boxing assault by white gloves, on black screen: length 15 seconds. Written slide for explanation: 10 seconds.
2. Chess game between Duchamp and Man Ray. Waterspout maneuvered by Picabia sweeps over the game: length 30 seconds.
3. Juggler and Père Lacolique: length 30 seconds.
4. Hunter shooting at the egg of an ostrich on waterspout; a dove comes out of the egg and lands on the hunter's head; a second hunter shooting at it (the head) kills the first hunter: he falls, the bird flies away: length 1 minute. Written slide 20 seconds.
5. 21 persons lying on their backs, showing the bottom of their feet, 10 seconds, handwritten slide 15 seconds.
6. Female dancer on transparent glass filmed from underneath: length 1 minute, written slide, 5 seconds.
7. Blowing up of balloons and rubber screens, on which figures will be drawn along with inscriptions: length 35 seconds.
8. A funeral: hearse drawn by a camel, etc., length 6 minutes, written slide 1 minute.[4]

Satie was more meticulous; he pressed Clair for a shot by shot breakdown of the finished film, with timing, so that he could carefully synchronize a score for it. This was before sound projection, and the orchestra of the ballet played along with the film.

Clair had a free hand. The artists named in the scenario all played their parts. He omitted the third and fifth sections, and freely improvised on the sixth and eighth.

Two years after the ballet, *Entr'Acte* went into distribution without sound and with the curtain raiser attached to the front of the film as a prologue. That was how Peterson and Broughton first saw it. In this form the film opens with a cannon moving by itself around the roof of a building in Paris. In slow motion, Satie and Picabia leap into the frame. They discuss a plan, which at first shocks Picabia, but he soon agrees to fire the cannon into the buildings where Satie has pointed. They do it. Then they fire it in the direction of the camera and audience.

A series of superimpositions establishes the roofs of Paris, while images of balloon dolls being inflated and a ballerina, seen from below dancing on a glass floor, are intercut.

The flames of matches dance in superimposition in the hair of a man whose face cannot be seen. He scratches his head, then lifts it, revealing surprised eyes. Repeatedly throughout this scene and through most of the film we see glimpses of the ballerina, until a change of camera angle eventually reveals her not to be a ballerina at all, but a bearded man dressed as one.

An offscreen jet of water ruins a game of checkers, played by Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray. Then, after a series of superimpositions involving water, a paper boat, and the pseudo-ballerina, we see an ostrich egg held in the air by a vertical jet of water. A hunter spots it, but every time he lifts his rifle, the egg multiplies into two, four, eleven dancing eggs. Finally it becomes singular again, and he fires. To his happy surprise a pigeon falls from the sky and lands on his head.

Picabia, on a nearby roof with a rifle, has spotted the hunter with the pigeon on his head. He tries to shoot the bird off, but he kills the man instead. The scene jumps to his funeral. Yet the water still holds up the egg and the dancer dances. A ridiculous burial procession is led by a camel-drawn hearse. As they pass an amusement park the hearse comes loose and the whole party, including the widow and numerous old men, chase after it. As the hearse picks up speed, the camera movements become wilder and scenes from a roller-coaster are intercut with the chase.

Eventually the coffin flies off the hearse, rolls through a field, and pops open. Out comes a stage magician. With his magic wand he makes the assembled mourners disappear; then he performs the same trick on himself.

When the title "Fin" appears, a man jumps through the paper upon which it is written; then the shot is reversed so that he leaps back, the paper mends its rip, and the film ends.

In its round-about manner of narrative, its slapstick chase, its exploitation of camera tricks both as metaphors and as developments of the "plot," and the comic violence of its shooting scenes, *Entr'Acte* prefigures *The Cage*. It anticipates *The Potted Psalm*, on the other hand, with repeated interruptions of the picaresque development by fragments of continuous scenes which bear no direct relation to the main chain of events. Behind all three films, of course, lies the comedy style of Max Sennett.

The differences among *Entr'Acte, The Potted Psalm, The Cage*, and the slapstick comedy are more interesting than their similarities. The avant-garde films which owe their inspiration, in part at least, to slapstick comedy tend to exhibit a shift of rhythm away from comic punctuation (for the humor of the great film comedians is a rhythmic function) toward the abstract. This displacement reveals the irrationality and the unconscious dynamic behind the previously funny archetype, the chase. In an effective silent comedy there is no time for metaphors. The comic film-maker can only deviate from the main line of comic action when the point to which he deviates extends the humor by prolonging it. The periodic recurrences of the pseudo-ballerina in Clair's film relieve the tension of the funeral chase.

Yet when we compare *Entr'Acte* with either *The Potted Psalm* or *The Cage*, it seems a much more comical film. Satire was the film-makers' inspiration. Remember the circumstances which motivated its creation: the bearded ballerina mocks the expectation of a ballet audience, and the members of the funeral procession mock the audience itself. In the pro-

logue and in the murder of the hunter, Picabia and Satie flippantly disregard the most potent taboo of modern times—murder for its own sake. In the same spirit of provocation, Satie had announced that his music for the ballet would be "pornographic."

In *The Potted Psalm* and *The Cage*, the slapstick sources are at a greater remove. Everything moves in an aesthetic direction. The filmmakers of the 1940s in America, unlike their Parisian predecessors, were not mocking the sacred cows of the bourgeoisie. The Second World War had obliterated much of what Picabia was attacking. In the films Peterson made, either as collaborator or sole maker, what had previously been social is made aesthetic.

Broughton, however, had a more classically comic sensibility. While Peterson's humor resided in his sense of the irrational and in the collision of ideas, Broughton's focused on character. The childlike man is Broughton's favorite metaphor. "Mother's" grave, the bordello aroma of the interior scenes, and a shot of the hero on a kiddymobile must surely have been among Broughton's contributions to *The Potted Psalm*.

In an interview with the author Peterson remembered how Broughton used to roar with laughter at the rushes of the film, while he was, if anything, disappointed. But when the editing was completed it was Peterson who felt the magic of the whole, while Broughton was apprehensive. Peterson was the synthesizing Surrealist; Broughton, the comedian of archetypes. His humor turned on the universal rather than the peculiar; the emblem he took for himself, and wore on a stickpin, is the alchemical sign for essence.

In 1948 Broughton made his first film by himself. He employed a cameraman (in this case, Frank Stauffacher) as he did on almost all his subsequent films. Broughton's experience, aside from *The Potted Psalm*, had been as a poet and playwright. It is out of his early plays and poems that the theme of this first film, *Mother's Day*, emerged.

His own notes are an articulate introduction to the film:

> From the beginning I accepted the camera's sharply accurate eye as a value rather than a limitation. The camera's challenge to the poet is that his images must be as definite as possible: the magic of his persons, landscapes, and actions occurring in an apparent reality. At this point something approaching choreography must enter in: the finding of meaningful gesture and movement. And from the beginning I decided to make things happen head on, happen within the frame, without vagueness, without camera trickery—so that it would be how the scenes were made to happen in front of the lens, and then how they were organized in the montage, that would evoke the world I wanted to explore.
>
> The subject matter of *Mother's Day* cannot, certainly, be considered specialized. Most of us have had some experience of

childhood, either by participation or by observation. But do we remember that children are often incomprehensibly terror-stricken, are always ready to slip over into some private nonsense-ritual, or into behavior based upon their misconception of the adult world? Furthermore, what about the "childish behavior" of grown-ups, their refusal to relinquish childhood misconceptions, or to confront the world they inhabit?

Although this film is, then, by its very nature, a nostalgic comedy, it eschews chronological accuracy in either the period details or the dramatic events. It has been one of the clichés of cinema since the days of cubism that the medium allows the artist to manipulate time: to cut it up, retard or accelerate it, and so forth. In *Mother's Day* historical time may be said to stand still. Periods and fashions are gently scrambled. The device is deliberate: for with this film we are in the country of emotional memory, where everything may happen simultaneously.

This is because the basic point of vision of the film is that of an adult remembering the past (and the past within the past): projecting himself back *as he is now*, and seeing his family and his playmates at his present age-level, regarding them with adult feelings and knowledge, and even projecting them forward into his present-day concerns.

In *Mother's Day* I deliberately used adults acting as children, to evoke the sense of projecting oneself as an adult back into memory, to suggest the impossible borderline between when one is child and when one is grown-up, and to implicate Mother in the world of the child fantasies as being, perhaps, the biggest child of them all—since she, in this case, has never freed herself from narcissistic daydreams.

Since this is a film about mothers and children, about families and forms of social experience, it is dominated by the circle, and—as Parker Tyler pointed out—by the object revolving on a fixed axis.[5]

A series of six ironic subtitles divide the sections of the film. It opens with a young man sleeping in the arms of a statue, an evocation of the opening of Chaplin's *City Lights*, and another instance of this ubiquitous motif in the early American avant-garde film. Then we read "Mother was the loveliest woman in the world. And Mother wanted everything to be lovely." A number of brief, enigmatic shots follow in what the film-maker calls a "formal prelude."

This basically abstract passage introduces a number of typical elements in the film without explicitly delineating the main ironic structure. The impression of an animated family album, heightened by the nostalgic music of Howard Brubeck, written for the film, is immediately apparent. In this brief passage, the mother has at least four changes of costume. In the

remainder of the film there is a minor or major change of this sort in nearly every one of her appearances on the screen. These changes involve an intentional mixture of periods and styles. At one point in the prologue gauze in front of the camera modifies the image.

The effect of the alternations of costume, the short shots, the occasionally unusual angles, and the gauze is to create a scintillating image which seems to weave randomly through time. The music, the rhythmic intercutting between images, and the concentric movements within the frame—such as the spinning medallion—give a fluid cast to the continuous metamorphosis. The dialectic of tensions, the smooth rhythm, and the staccato imagery make for formal strength which is reinforced by a play on scale and foreshortening related to the dominant themes of the film. The montage in the ruins of the building uses depth and angles to suggest the dominance of the female over the male.

In the next section, entitled "Mother always said she could have had her pick," foreshortening makes the same statement. We see Mother at her upstairs window, shot from below to magnify her stature. Her suitors, filmed from high above, are diminished by the perspective of the camera.

The first shot of this episode is as brilliant an example of both metaphor and ellipsis as can be found anywhere in the avant-garde film. The camera pans up the stairs of a wooden house to its façade, at which moment we see that the house has been destroyed. There is *only* the façade. Next we see Mother smiling from the second-story window of a different house. The montage simultaneously suggests that Mother's house is now destroyed (in other words, the ruin is proleptic), and that Mother herself is a façade (a visual metaphor). This is a rather simple example of cinematic prolepsis. In its more radical employment by Broughton in *Dreamwood* and by Brakhage and Markopoulos in several films, a shot may first seem to function in a simple relationship to the previous shots and only later, sometimes much later, is it grounded in a context more appropriate to its manifold aspects.

Broughton constructed the entire episode around the image of Mother scanning her suitors from the window. In each of her appearances, as I have mentioned, she changes a hat, an ornament, or her dress. The use of ellipsis is extreme and highly original. First, one suitor presents himself. We see mother from below; when the camera cuts back to the suitor, there are now two of them, holding gifts. The exchange continues until there are four. At the end of the sequence, there is a man in her room.

With the changes of shots in the interior scenes, there are changes of background comparable to the alternation of costumes. The sets themselves are in the theatrical tradition: screens, plants, pictures on the walls; a minimum of objects and furniture necessary to give the impression of a cluttered, turn-of-the-century interior. The basically static camera creates a sense of composition-in-depth out of these stage backgrounds. Mirrors are frequently used. In the third episode, "And she picked father," we see the bearded father for the first time, reflected in an oval hand mirror into

which Mother had been looking as she combed her hair. He is next seen, with his eyes bulging, posed in a frame on the wall as if he were a portrait.

The image, at the end of that section, of her playing with a doll introduces the next part, "Then Mother always said she wanted little boys and girls to be lovely." We see her children. Although they are grown up, they play the games of children. In this and the remaining two sections of the film, the concentration on Mother is gradually replaced by that on the children. The progress of their games involves disguised rituals of the passage into adolescence. At the same time, their satiric mimicry of their parents reflects the adult world. As Broughton pointed out in the note I have quoted, the use of adults to play children is not solely ironic; it recreates the psychological superimposition of the past and childhood upon the adult.

In their games, each "child" plays alone, though several may appear simultaneously in a single shot. One waves her dolls; another devours a box of candies; another chalks a naked lady on the wall. They tease, fight, and cry. While they play, Mother stays at her dressing table, and the father, with his straw hat on his knee, watches them impatiently, tapping with his cane. The elements of this section are held together by a strong internal rhythm created by the tapping cane, the moving swings, a bowling pin rolling in water, and hopscotch steps—all in time with each other and with the music.

The thought or sight of the children makes Mother envision her old age. In the first shot of the next episode, "Because ladies and gentlemen were the loveliest thing in the world," we see the face of an old lady who whispers to a man, so that the children cannot hear. But they have their own party. We see a homely girl sitting on a couch with a man. Another girl enters the room. Then we see the first one on the same couch with two men. The very same entrance shot is repeated four times. In each instance another man joins the girl on the couch. Thus the children use a parody of Mother's courtship for their own sexual initiation.

The sixth and final title, "And so we learned how to be lovely too," completes the ironic definition of loveliness. In a series of flashes, six bowls, each larger than the previous one, appear on the screen with a tape-measure indicating their diameters. Like the spinning medallion, and later the spinning mandolin, they are hermetic images. These can be taken as metaphors for growth, to be sure; their function in the film is primarily irrational, rhythmic, and textural. They recall a sequence in *The Potted Psalm*, in which a nut is cracked and bread is broken in rapid succession. The sudden and unexplained deployment of a series of close-up details enriches the texture of *Mother's Day* by intensifying its unpredictability.

The last episode begins when Mother leaves the house for a ride in an antique car. The children symbolically take over the house. A girl tries on her mother's hats; a boy, his father's. The straw hat is destroyed. They pull off the father's beard. Out of a window fly the straw hat and the cane. Finally we see the living portrait of the father, only now upside-down. The

mother, seen as usual at her mirror, is "left behind in a empty room, still dressed to go out but with nowhere to go" (Broughton's note).

The inventiveness of *Mother's Day* has had no imitators and therefore little influence on the subsequent development of the avant-garde film in America. It remains a unique cinematic object without predecessors or heirs. Simpler films by Broughton, with less radical formal ambitions, have had more influence; Christopher MacLaine, in *The End*, made a black version of *Four in the Afternoon*, and Ron Rice extended *Loony Tom, the Happy Lover* into *The Flower Thief*, though neither were aware that they were so close to Broughton. Broughton's intense interest in comic types turned his film away from the trance film inspirations in a way that neither he nor his critics could see at the time. The trance film was predicated upon the transparency of the somnambulistic protagonist within the dream landscape. The perspective of the camera, inflected by montage, directly imitated his consciousness. Broughton invested too much in the individuality of his protagonists and too little in the cinematic representation of perception to contribute substantially to the trance film. It was only much later with the making of *Dreamwood* (1971) that the debts to Cocteau and Deren, which he had always readily acknowledged, surfaced visibly in his work. Even when he touched upon psycho-drama by playing the chief role in his second film, a version of the quest for sexual self-discovery so central to the early American avant-garde film, he saw himself with such irony, and so clearly as a psychological type, that *The Adventures of Jimmy* (1950) is as far from *Fireworks, Swain*, or *Flesh of Morning*—the psycho-dramas of Kenneth Anger, Gregory Markopoulos, and Stan Brakhage—as *Mother's Day* was from *The Cage* or Deren's films.

The Adventures of Jimmy is an autobiographical picaresque in which a mountain boy looks for companionship in the big city. The episodes are highly elliptical. Jimmy climbs into a canoe on a small stream in one shot and finds himself in a busy bay in the next; he wanders into a boarding house looking for a room and is followed by a prostitute, only to rush out and away, comically horrified, an instant later. In rapid succession he seeks love in an artist's rendezvous, a dance hall, and a Turkish bath; he tries religion and psychoanalysis.

With every episode he changes his hat, from farmer's cap, to sailor's crew, to underworld fedora, to a ceremonial top hat. The last is the emblem of his final solution, marriage, as he walks out of church with his bride.

The irony, the ellipses, the symbolic changes of costume, that we found in *Mother's Day*, recur here. Yet they are less ironical, less elliptical, and the transformations not as radical. But above all, the difference between the two films lies in their respective rhythms. The former is as calculated and modulated as the latter is casual.

By the time that Broughton made this film, Peterson, now deeply involved in the use of sound in cinema, had made his last avant-garde film,[6] although he probably didn't realize it at the time. In 1948 and 1949 he

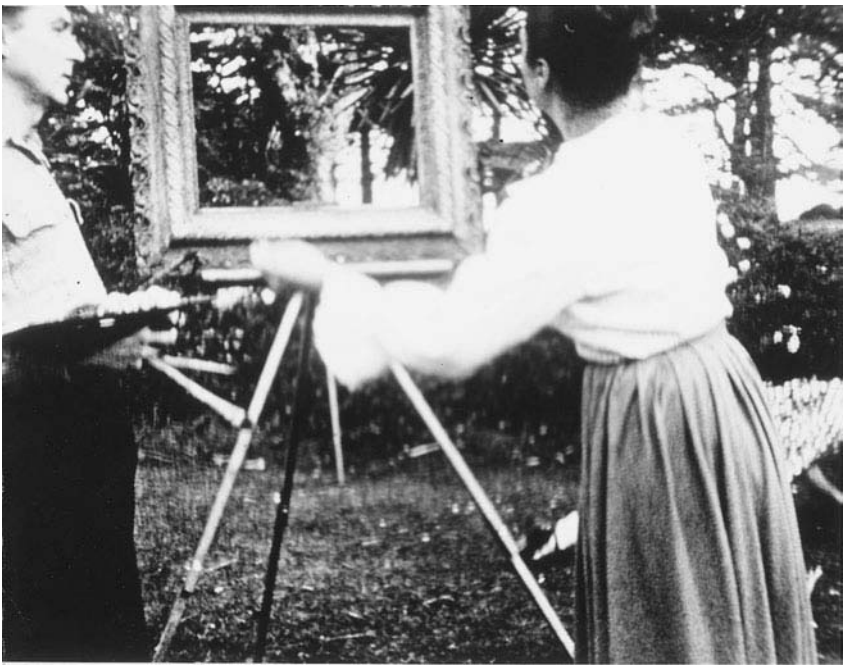
produced three sound films with his Workshop 20 at the California School of Fine Arts, the last two of which are his greatest achievements. *The Petrified Dog, Mr. Frenhofer and the Minotaur*, and *The Lead Shoes* were made in successive semesters as group projects with student participation.

The Petrified Dog takes its title from the statue of a lion seen repeatedly throughout the film and from an allusion to the freezing of the camera's motion, which we see first in the background of the film's titles. In theme, it might be called the further adventures of Alice in Wonderland. The heroine Alice climbs out of a hole in a park with her characteristic broad Victorian child's hat into a world where we have already seen a painter working within an empty frame, a slow motion runner hardly getting anywhere, a lady in fast motion eating her lipstick, and a photographer who sets his camera up with a delayed shutter so that he can stand on pedestals and be snapped as a statue. Into this Wonderland she crawls, in slow motion at first.

The events of the film are essentially disconnected. We see them in the order in which Alice, continually blinking (as the hero of *The Potted Psalm* continually twitched), turns her shutter-like gaze on them. Like Maya Deren's first heroine, she also sees herself in the mad landscape. The sole example of distorted imagery in this film is a brief shot of Alice looking at her reflection in the hubcap of a car. Peterson operated the camera himself this time. He eschewed the dynamic movements that characterize all his other films except for a few timid pans and some brief moving shots of the lion statue, both normal and upside-down. The stasis of the camera functions organically within the film: there is a sense that the episodes and gags are eternal, contiguous realities, not progressive events, and the camera style emphasizes the discreteness and fixity of the separate scenes, while the use of slow and fast motion brackets them.

I have deliberately neglected the climactic scene of the film. A terrified young man wanders over a statue of Abraham Lincoln and into a massage parlor where two men are fighting; a skeleton decides to take advantage of him, prone on the massage table. As the skeleton wrestles with him and possibly rapes him, in normal and slow motion, the camera is liberated from its tripod and joins in the frenzy. From this point on, the episodes show signs of internal development. A bum approaches the painter with an empty frame, sticks his head through, and demands a hand-out. When the artist finally pulls a full cup of hot coffee out of his pocket, the bum is thankless; he throws it down and he kicks it away. The lipstick-eating lady eventually finishes her pasty lunch and walks away dropping several handkerchiefs. The painter follows her, collecting the droppings, which eventually include a bra and a slip. He pursues her through her door, only to be thrust out and attacked by her husband. Alice also sees herself in a chase: she eludes her nanny.

The most interesting episode in the film is the one involving the painter and the bum, and it is interesting precisely insofar as it alludes to the art of René Magritte. The empty frame which makes a painting out of what-



(a)

(a) The surrealistic frame in Peterson's *The Petrified Dog*.
(b, c) Anamorphic images in Sidney Peterson's *The Cage* [the protagonist removes his eyeball] and *Mr. Frenhofer and the Minotaur* [dancing on the mattress].

ever rectangle of reality it faces recalls a number of Magritte paintings in which a canvas, resting on an easel fixed in a landscape or interior, transfigures, in an illusionary way, the space in which it is placed.

If there is a single theme which pervades the early American avant-garde film, it is the *primacy of the imagination*. In Peterson's films this theme is wedded to his own interest in the irrational sensibility of the artist. Yet despite the shift from the anarchistic themes of *Entr'Acte* to the psychological and aesthetic themes of Peterson's first three efforts, those films are closer to the sensibility of Dada than Surrealism.

The sound track of *The Petrified Dog* is a primitive, and early, example of *musique concrete*. Peterson used four nonmusicians, a couple of traditional instruments, including an open piano so that the strings could be plucked or beaten, and anything at hand, even slapping oneself before the microphone of Hy Hirsch's wire recorder. After a few run-throughs, they recorded the entire soundtrack in one long take. Clyfford Still, who was also teaching at the California School of Fine Arts, was so taken with the music that he offered to pay for the transfer to film if he could have a copy of the wire recording.

(b)

(c)

The soundtrack of *The Petrified Dog* is as free and as wild as the camera movements of Peterson's two earlier films. It is also functional within the experience of the film. The problems of the formal use of sound in film (synchronism, asynchronism, montage, or picture with sound) have no place in a discussion of *The Petrified Dog*. There have been two consistent approaches to sound within the American avant-garde: the functional and the formal. The extreme formal position, which Stan Brakhage propounds and Peter Kubelka practices, and which we shall consider in detail in the portions of this book devoted to their works, holds that no sound should be employed in a film except where it is absolutely necessary, that is, where the film has been conceived as a careful audiovisual synthesis. The functional position rests on the assumption that music (or words) intensify the cinematic experience, even when the film has been shot and edited without consideration for the sound. The functionalist hires a composer after his film has been edited; at his most casual, he finds a piece of recorded music that "fits" his work. In the catalogue of *Art in Cinema* (1947), considerable space is devoted to the editors' researches on the original musical soundtracks for many early French and German avant-garde films, and when research produced no results, they suggested a record which they had found, by experimentation, "fit" the older films.

Broughton and Peterson had asked Francean Campbell, a relative of the man who first lent them a camera, to compose music for *The Potted Psalm*. They did not like the result; they never used it. Peterson noted in his discussion of this experiment that a soundtrack was not necessary then because Art in Cinema (the only place where they conceived the film could be shown) had been so active in finding records to play with silent films. It is true that live or recorded music usually accompanied the silent avant-garde films when they were shown in the 1920s. But the difference between the speed of projection at that time (between 16 and 18 frames per second) and the speed standardized in 1929 for sound (24 frames per second) made it next to impossible to put sound on those films even after the invention and popular use of optical soundtracks. The distribution of early silent films through the library of the Museum of Modern Art created a new aesthetic of *silence* within the American film experience. Thus Maya Deren made her first three films intentionally silent, as Brakhage has made most of his films since 1958.

As collaborators, and later separately, Peterson and Broughton began with a functional conception of sound and moved toward a formal one. (Broughton returned to using a composer in the 1960s.) In both cases the formalization of the soundtrack occurred through a displacement of narrative information from visual images to voice, resulting in an elliptical treatment of the montage and an oblique method of conveying essential information through poetry, songs, or a stream-of-consciousness monologue. The simultaneous displacement of the narrative principle in both sound and picture necessarily provides for a new synthesis in their com-

bination and for the possibility of a formal interplay through asynchronism, as one anticipates or reiterates the other.

It was Peterson rather than Broughton who made the most of these formal possibilities. His step toward the integration of the visual and the aural coincided with the development of his general conception of cinematic structure. *Mr. Frenhofer and the Minotaur* and *The Lead Shoes* recall the complex fusion of trance film, myth, and allusion in the kind of spherical mould that we found in Maya Deren's *Ritual in Transfigured Time*. Peterson has an irony that Maya Deren totally lacked; these two films are more mandarin, more allusive than hers.

The elements of Peterson's synthesis in these films are easily isolated: for *Mr. Frenhofer and the Minotaur* they are Balzac's story, *Le Chef d'Oeuvre Inconnu*, Pablo Picasso's engraving *Minotauromachie* and a monologue in James Joyce's style. The visual unification is achieved simply and elegantly by the nearly absolute use of anamorphic photography and either fluid camera movements responding to the movements of the actors or almost choreographic movements of the actors within the static frame. Slow motion, especially at the beginning of the film, contributes to its gracefulness. There is almost no fast motion, superimposition, or wild movement of the camera. Peterson operated the camera himself.

The film-maker treated Balzac's story as the framework for continuing his investigation of the artistic sensibility, which had been the theme of all of his earlier films. It was a theme especially suited to the situation out of which these films emerged—a workshop designed to infuse somewhat uninspired painters and sculptors with excitement about making art through a collective film-making experience.

Balzac's short story, from his *Contes Philosophiques* of 1831, involves two real painters of the seventeenth century and one imaginary one. The mature Porbus and the novice Poussin meet Balzac's creation, Frenhofer, who subjects Porbus' latest work to a scathing critique, shows him how to bring life and depth to it with a few brush strokes, and then proceeds to tell them about the masterpiece he has been working on for the past decade, *La Belle Noiseuse*, a portrait without a model of the courtesan Catherine Lescault. They are desperate to see the work in progress. Frenhofer refuses to show it.

Porbus conceives a plan for bringing Poussin's beautiful young mistress to Frenhofer as a model so that he may compare perfect living beauty with his idealization. This had been Frenhofer's dream, and after much persuasion Gilette is talked into modeling for the old master. Shocked when he finally sees the picture, Poussin cannot help exclaiming that there is nothing there but a wall of chaotic colors and formless masses. All the two painters can see on the other's canvas is a foot, an absolutely perfect realistic foot buried beneath the accumulated revisions of the painting.

For Balzac, there is no question but that Frenhofer in his Pygmalion-like desire to perfect his idealized women has obliterated his masterpiece.

The thrust of the story, in any case, is not only aesthetic but moral: a parallelism and antithesis between the love of Gilette for Poussin and of Frenhofer for his painting, between the model in the flesh and the illusion on canvas, and ultimately between a man's work and his love.[7]

Peterson transferred the character of Gilette from an innocent and devoted mistress to a garrulous, flighty art student; the reluctance and foreboding of the original become the narcissistic fantasies of the woman in the film. If we could consider the film without its soundtrack, it would be elliptical, involuted, and schematic. The interior monologue, which has subtleties and reversals of its own, provides the narrative coherence.

The anamorphic imagery congests the space, isolates the images, and suggests the realm of dream, memory, or a visionary state. The opening distortion of a cat with a dead mouse, followed by the slow fainting scream of Gilette accompanied by a violin whine, sets the tone for the whole film. It is one of several framing devices which initiate a dialogue of perspectives within the work.

There is a fade; the brief image of a fencer; and then we are thrust into the middle of a scene complicated by the beginning of an interior monologue of associations. Gilette and a young man (Poussin) are dancing in slow motion on a mattress. The hand-held camera, gracefully following the bouncing of the bodies and the swaying of the hem of her dress, accents the erotic metaphor. A change of camera distance reveals that an old man (Porbus) has been watching their dance. Poussin formally introduces him, and he kisses Gilette's hand. They dance together on the bed. Another shot of the fencer, followed by a little girl carrying a candle (two images based on Picasso's etching), marks the transition from this scene to the next.

In that scene, on the same bed and without the men, Gilette repeatedly pets her cat, intercut with recurrent images of the two figures from the *Minotauromachie*. These parallel scenes remain independent of each other, never appearing in the same frame, until the climax of the film. Yet in the monologue the elements from Balzac and Picasso are intertwined from the beginning. As she plays with the cat, she speaks the following monologue:

> So much for nature mortified. And it doesn't run very deep anyway. Better never than too early. It's ever a question of how or ever. And no wonder the tired eye is a bird who sees something worked over for ten years. And no wonder too, it's a plot to bribe the mater so chere with a modele, so to louvre to then chef d'oeuvre. And in this dream I too, caught like a spittle girl, immersed all in a stirry, a silly story: to pose or not to pose. I love him; I love him not. Or rather, since I love him less, already, why not?
>
> An old man, mad about paint, Frenhofer and Gilette, boquet and med, me and Minotaur. Cats are carnivorous. Somewhere there lies a man's head and the leftover part of a bull. God save us. Was that really a threat to Greek maidens?

The introduction of elements from the *Minotauromachie* occurs gradually. The minotaur itself, like Picasso's, obviously a man with a beast headpiece, enters while Gilette is petting her cat. Poussin has come to visit her, to sit with her on the mattress, and to read aloud to her from a book, Balzac's *Le Chef-d'Oeuvre Inconnu*. Although we have already seen in schematic form and heard in fragmentary allusions almost half of the story, the reading begins at the beginning, in Gilette's voice. "On a cold December morning in the year 1512, a young man whose clothing was somewhat of the thinnest. . . ."

The narrative returns to stream of consciousness ("Why not? Ham on rye, cheese and salad. If I'm ruined it's a question of pride or games. There's nothing in it for him. If he showed his wife, it's because he loved her not in order to see something better. Or because").

By this point in the film, the images of the *Minotauromachie* occupy as much screen time as those from the story, and subsequently the proportions shift in favor of Picasso-like material with the narrative elements coming to function as an interruption of the etching come to life, just as the fencer and the little girl had previously been formal interruptions of the story. A contrast is established between the fast motion, jump-cut, repetitive runs up and down a ladder by a new figure, a man in a loincloth, and the lady in the window calmly petting her dove.

The last six shots of the sequence I have been describing bring the two worlds of the film's title together. A lunge from the fencer strikes Frenhofer in the heart. He falls to the ground and the fencer wipes the blood from the foil. Just before the last image of the dying painter's head, Peterson shows the Minotaur looking at the miraculous canvas, which of course we never get to see. The death occurs without a passage of monologue or reading.

Balzac's portrayal of the death of Frenhofer is an appendix to his story; it is the pitiful conclusion to a tragedy of failure. For Peterson and for us, after the experience of the past century of painting, Frenhofer's canvas is not a failure but a prophecy. The climax of the film—the death of the artist—calls up the myth of Pygmalion and invokes in explicit terms the central theme of the visionary cinema: the triumph of the imagination.

It is not the artist who brings his work to life, although that is his aspiration as reflected in the paraphrases from Balzac in the monologue: "Where is art? It's absolutely invisible. It is the curve of a loving girl, and what fields of light! what spirit of living line that surrounds the flesh and defines the figure, that stands out so that if you wanted to you could pass your hand along the back." It is the work, represented by the elements of the *Minotauromachie*, that engulf the man.

The elements of *Mr. Frenhofer and the Minotaur* gravitate toward the idea of abstraction. By choosing to incorporate a painting from Picasso's classical period, rather than, say, an example of analytical Cubism, Peterson approaches the prophetic facet of Frenhofer's painting through indirection. In an interview he described his intention:

> It was my decision to do a thing about the Balzac story, taking seriously as the theme of the story the conflict between Poussin's Classicism and its opposite. So as strained through my mind it became, really a way of exploring the conflict stated in Rousseau's remark to Picasso: "We are the two greatest painters: you in the Egyptian manner; and I in the modern." In a sense. [I was] taking the quest for absolute beauty in the Balzac character and contrasting that with Picassoidal Classicism, the imitation of the *Minotauromachie*. It was not necessarily thought out clearly as though one were writing an essay; this was thematic material. Then the chips fell, partly again, in response to the curious limitations of doing this kind of thing with people who were not even "anti-actors."[8]

Peterson provides the material for a dream-like interpretation of the whole film. The opening and ending sequences contribute to the circularity of a dream; Gilette's trauma of seeing her cat with a dead mouse may become, in the dream, an image of the minotauromachia (scratching the cat, she calls him, "mini-mini-mini-tower"). By another train of association, reflected in the monologue, she connects "Kitty" with Catherine Lescault of Balzac's story, which her lover may have read to her.

Peterson was never completely satisfied with *Mr. Frenhofer and the Minotaur* because he had originally conceived of a more serious rendering of the monologue. He tried it himself, but found the recording incomprehensible. The woman who eventually recited it was perhaps too glib and heavy of emphasis for Peterson's liking, but in his intimation of the film's failure, he ironically impersonates his protagonist.

When the magazine *Dance Perspectives* published a special issue on dance in film, Peterson contributed a characteristically witty article. He begins with a reference to slow motion, more revealing of his Workshop 20 films than his attempts at filming dance:

> So far as I know, no one has ever shot even a fragment of ballet at 100,000 frames per second, even though by this simple device one minute of shooting would be extended to more than 69 hours of performance. It would be like watching the hour hand of a clock move. The only possible audience would be the performers themselves, and not even the most narcissistic would be able to take all 69 hours.
>
> I mention this fantastic possibility only because slow motion has, almost from the beginning, been the most obvious technical device (instant lyricism) for producing results that have gratified dancers and pleased cameramen.[9]

In *Mr. Frenhofer and the Minotaur* slow motion, along with anamorphosis and ellipsis, solves the problem posed by bad actors. The dancing

on the bed, and later the gestures of the old painter as he throws out his guests and then sits to admire his painting, shifting his chair and folding his arms, have an elegance and emphasis in slow motion that they would not otherwise have. He writes:

> If dancing were basket-weaving, there would be no problem about its being relegated to the role of subject matter in a cinematic or televised message. The main difficulty arises, I believe, because dance too is an art of the moving image. It does not relate to film as, for example, scene painting relates to theatre. It is, in effect, a competing medium.
>
> The important thing here is the realization that the art of the moving image did not commence with Fred Ott sneezing for Thomas Edison with the help of a jar of red pepper, any more than it commenced with Loie Fuller doing her famous *Bat Dance* in somebody's back yard for an anonymous cameraman. Both were practitioners of an art as old as humanity, if not older.[10]

We are at the crux of Peterson's genius: his ability to formulate a new perspective and to test its implications.

> Film has the problem of divesting itself of much that it had accomplished; of, in effect, starting over from scratch, returning to a time when it still had choices in the directions it might take, when it had not yet discovered its potentiality as a narrative or dramatic medium.
>
> The stupendous past and a Pisgah future are clearly in the hands of experimentalists, who have nothing to lose by their pains. The traditions of the art of the moving image are as broad as they are long.[11]

The example he uses to illustrate his new conceptual orientation for film as an aspect of "the art of the moving image" is Maya Deren's *Choreography for Camera*:

> Beatty's celebrated leap had its origins, not in film, but in the so-called Dumb Ballet of the English stage, of which *Fun in a Bakehouse* and *Ki Ko Kookeeree* were examples. *The Oxford Companion to the Theatre* calls the leap "the supreme test of the trick player" throughout all that part of the nineteenth century when it flourished. In this sense, Miss Deren (whose leap Beatty's really was) with her leap joined Méliès and a company that included—not Taglioni, Grisi, or Cerrito—but Grimaldi, the Lupinos, the Conquests, and those extraordinary "entortillationists" and "zampillerostationists," the Hanlon-Lees.[12]

In the first three films from Workshop 20 the students participated as actors and observers. In the summer semester of 1949, Peterson decided to let them participate in the conception of the film. A couple from Virginia (the Johnstons, as Peterson recalls) suggested that they film a traditional ballad. Mr. Johnston had just been studying the relationship of old English ballads to their American counterparts. Another student volunteered a diving suit, and still another her hamsters. The sheer incongruity of the materials must have awakened the best of the film-maker's problem-solving and synthetic instincts. An instinct for the synthetic is normally the gift of a film editor, who is often faced with the task of making a coherent whole out of disparate and insufficient materials; Peterson, however, carried the editing principle into the very conception of his films.

The anthropological principle of Johnston's thesis, that the ballads take on irrational and disjunctive aspects after translocation and the passage of time, became the deliberate aesthetic of Peterson's new film; he would accelerate the disintegration by scrambling two ballads and by employing the type of cinematic ellipsis and association he had developed in his previous film.

The titles of the film mention "The Three Edwards and a Raven," a reference to the mixture within the film of the ballads, "The Three Ravens," and "Edward." Parker Tyler's notes on the Cinema 16 screening of the film in 1950 are particularly fine:

> Peterson came upon two old ballads, "Edward" and "The Three Ravens," the first a Colonial popularization of the Cain-and-Abel legend, and the second concerning three birds that witnessed a fallow-deer carry off a dying knight from the field of battle. In Peterson's film, the mother's passionate hysteria when she learns of "Abel's" murder indicates that at least a symbolic incest is present, a point given more weight when we consider that "Edward" is a variation of an older Scotch ballad, "Lord Randall," about a son who confesses to his mother that he killed his *father*.
>
> In that timeless time in which the true creator does preliminary work—perhaps in a twinkle—Peterson visualized Edward, the murderous "Cain," in kilts and the corpse of "Abel" in a diving suit; thus the two ballads are fused because the diving suit substitutes for the knight's armor in "The Three Ravens." Then he must have felt the violence of a complex insight: a diver's lead shoes keep him on the seabottom, which seems equivalent to that abysmal level of instinct where anything is possible.
>
> When the frantic mother digs up her son from the sand on the shore, she is performing again the labor she had on giving birth to him; the suit itself becomes a sort of coffin. Once more,

> before he is consigned to the grave, she must hold him close to her. If we can assume all this, as I believe we can, we may go further to note that the tragic emotion is ingeniously modified by two devices: one is the hopscotch game seen parallel with the main action. Every mother of two sons has the problem of balancing her affections, which must be divided between them. This moral action was once anticipated in the physical terms of the hopscotch which she played as a girl: the player must straddle a line between two squares without falling or going outside them. The second device, the boogie-woogie accompaniment with its clamorous chorus, like the first, may have been instinctively rather than consciously calculated by Peterson. It operates unmistakably: the voices and music supply a savage rhythm for the ecstatic if accursed performers of the domestic catastrophe. It is the lyrical interpretation of the tragedy and suggests the historical fact that Greek tragedy derived from the Dionysian revel. Lastly we have the sinister implement and symbol of the castration rite, the knife and the bread—perhaps representing the murderer's afterthought rather than part of his deed.[13]

The Lead Shoes opens with the hopscotch game. In a film of approximately one hundred shots, this image occurs fifteen times. Its repetition contributes to the frenetic pulse of the work; like the dancing on the mattress in the earlier film, it sets the tone and rhythm of the whole; in this case, fast, jumpy, hysterical movement, often filmed backward.

The complexities begin with the next scene (introduced by another hopscotch image). The mother pulls off the diver's helmet. Then she opens the helmet window and takes out what appear to be three rats. While she is doing this, a barefoot man in a kilt enters the frame; blood drips on his feet. Thus is the condensed and elliptical introduction of Edward. We see the helmet become bloody; then we see his bloody hands on his mother's nightgown, and he leaves.

The penultimate repetition of the hopscotch game (the final occurrence is the last image of the film) introduces the longest and most intricate episode of the film. With the help of strangers whom she had accosted on the street, the mother manages to hoist the diver in his suit up to her balcony and drags him across the floor and onto the bed. She strips him of his suit; and then, in the film's most enigmatic image, lowers the body rather than the suit into the street. The instant the dead man's head hits the sidewalk, Peterson cuts to a bounding loaf of bread, suggesting a ghoulish transubstantiation. Edward picks up the bread. In a series of jump-cuts we see him eating it in an outdoor cafe. In his hands, the loaf becomes a bone. He puts it down; suddenly there is a dog in his chair munching on the bone. These shots occur one after the other without any intercutting.

Here is the point of maximum hysteria on the soundtrack. Peterson

put together a jazz band, made up of the faculty of the art school where he taught. His students sing, howl, and chant, with the repetitiousness of a broken phonograph, phrases from the two ballads. He credits the Johnstons, with their experience of ejaculatory singing, for some of the intensity of the soundtrack.

The mother, at the height of her hysteria, accented by a twisting of the anamorphic lens, begins to writhe sexually on top of the empty, prone diving suit. We return to the dog at the table. In a reverse sequence, without actually reversing the photography, the bone becomes bread again, and Edward breaks it. Blood drips onto his plate, and he eats with fiendish relish as the scene fades out and then in on the last shot of the hopscotch game.

In addition to the transference that Tyler notes of diving suit to coffin to knight's armor, Peterson has short-circuited the ballads so that the scavenging mother assumes the role of the fallow deer in "The Three Ravens" who carries off the body of the dead knight; Edward becomes the ravaging ravens, a symbolic cannibal. One of his responses, in the ballad and on the soundtrack, to the endlessly repeated question, "How came that blood on the point of your sword, my son?" was that it was the blood of his dog. Here the dog also crosses over his role to become one of the ravens, eating the bone from the bread.[14]

The Lead Shoes and *Mr. Frenhofer and the Minotaur* are spherical forms with a narrative drift. The narration, such as it is, suggests eternally fixed cycles of behavior; it is aligned with ritual and myth. In both films the vital clues to the visual action are buried in the soundtrack, which also has functions altogether separate from conveying information. The soundtracks dislocate the sequence of events, and through their anticipations of what is to be seen, they magnify the sense of the eternal and the cyclic. These two films are complementary in another way, using the Apollonian myth of Pygmalion and the Dionysian myth of Pentheus in disguised forms.

One can see in the careers of Peterson and Maya Deren, after their initial bursts of film-making, similar problems for the visionary film-maker. Maya Deren tried to establish a foundation to support the avant-garde film-maker. That work spilled over into an effort to promote the cause of independent film-making and encourage—or sometimes discourage—new film-makers. It was an effort she did not live to see fulfilled. Peterson attempted to channel his radicalism in more conventional directions—the documentary, television, the animated cartoon—and encountered all the well-known problems. With a naive oversimplification that is unusual for him, he has said, "I was trying to solve all those problems, which have subsequently been solved by a *movement*."

Speaking of James Broughton, Peterson has defined the difference between their sensibilities and their works as that between visual orientation and *mise en scène*. Broughton wrote a brief autobiographical sketch in which he says, "Sidney Peterson introduced me to the magic of experi-

mental film." They are both unusually generous for one-time collaborators when referring to each other's work.

In an essay for *Film Culture 29*, reprinted in the *Film Culture Reader*, "A Note on Comedy in the Experimental Film," written thirteen years after *The Lead Shoes*, Peterson explores the comic roots of the entire avant-garde film movement; what he says scarcely applies to most of the avant-garde film activity between *The Lead Shoes* and the time of writing; naturally, he is referring to himself more than to anyone else. His reflections on the comic lead him to postulate a *dynamiteur* who must start the laughter when there is an ambivalence between the serious and the ridiculous; then he distinguishes between the audience who sees a finished film and the audience of its makers seeing the rushes and rough cuts. The feeling for participation, the sense of the making, the work behind the scenes, reveals his experimentalism in the late forties and early fifties; there is no film-maker for whom that term is more fitting than Peterson. Married to his idea of both experimentation and modernism is the notion of *blague*. He has pointed out the importance of Edmond and Jules de Goncourt's *Manette Salomon*, a novel about pre-Impressionist studio painting in France, as a central text of the sensibility of modern art, with its distinction between work for friends and for oneself, work to be seen in the studio and work destined for the salons. Out of this distinction emerges a rhetoric of authenticity, an attention to the working process, and a new sequence of myths of the artist.

The myth of the visual sensibility prevails now. Since the Second World War a synthesis has bound the "visual" and the "dynamic" in a supposed opposition to the "literary." Peterson's position toward film-making, like that of Maya Deren, draws energy from that emergent synthesis, although to subsequent "dynamic visualists" in the dialectic of abstraction their works will look "literary." Roughly stated, that position holds that the film-maker should be his own cameraman and editor. The visualist approach implies the synthetic unity of functions which the film industry has jealously separated. A corollary to the same proposition often demands that the film-maker appropriate the whole visual field, leading ultimately to an expressionistic employment of anamorphosis, superimposition, painting on film, and numerous other ramifications of the images as they come out of the camera "factory perfect." The emergence of this aesthetic during the reign of Abstract Expressionism is not a coincidence.

Peterson's distinction between visual organization and *mise-en-scène* boils down to a twin observation about Broughton: that he has a pronounced feeling for the dramatic and that he does not usually operate his own camera. He makes the kind of film where it is possible to employ a cameraman. The theatrical component in Broughton's cinema actually owes its greatest debts to the popular stage of the turn of the century, especially to *tableaux vivants*, mimes, and variety shows. This was a theater which was brought over into the first films. A nostalgia for the origins of cinema vitalizes much of Broughton's film-making.

If Peterson and Deren purified cinema and used its perspectives to imitate the human mind, Broughton took cinema back to the time before the elaborate narratives of the early century in order to recapture the excitement of seeing and showing human bodies in action, apparitions, and sudden disappearances, and to imbue that cinema of action with a more profound sense of the cyclical rhythms of life and the feeling for the essential he equates with poetry. In "What Magic in the Lanterns?" he wrote:

> Modern poetry has been deeply influenced by film. Modern film has not sufficiently returned the compliment. . . . Let us be quite clear. To ask for poetry in cinema does not mean that one is asking for verse plays transferred dutifully to celluloid. . . . No, one is asking rather for the heart of the matter. For the essence of experience, and the sense of the whole of it. For the effort and the absurdity, the song and the touch. For how we really feel and dream—grasped and visualized afresh.
>
> Memorable poetry has always been a dramatic ritual. The coliseum. The cathedral. The theatre. The bullring. For us, the cinema. . . .
>
> Lumière and Freud: fellow workers. They have given the Absolute a rough time and may have bashed it for good. The single picture is no longer the total picture. The modern mind thinks in associations and relativities, knowing the world's complex merry-go-round is a mixed up truth.[15]

Broughton's deepest feelings are for physical types, for costume and the naked human body, for cyclical rituals, and above all, for the comic. His capacity for laughter is extraordinary. I cannot help thinking that Peterson is writing about him in "A Note on Comedy in the Experimental Film":

> I remember once being involved in the production of a film that was made to the accompaniment of howls that would have put the most callous laugh-track to shame. Every bit of film that came back from the lab was enjoyed I won't say hysterically but with remarkable thoroughness.[16]

In that same essay, Peterson writes, "the best introductions to the extravagances of experimental cinema are not the works of Ford, Eisenstein or de Mille. They are those silent comedies, first French, then American, in which people used to experience, until their ribs ached, the ferocity and heartiness of the farcical view of things." What he is saying here is even truer of Broughton's work than of his own. They both share the ferocious

aspect of the comic, although it is much more on the surface in Peterson's rituals of destructive self-realization, dismemberment, and *omophagia.*[17] Yet the credit for reviving the methods of the silent comedians—the crew and a group of performers ready for anything, free to romp and spontaneously create a comic situation—belongs to Broughton. In his quest for the origins of cinema it is natural that he would feel an affinity for slapstick comedy, the genre which preserved the original vitalism of cinema the longest, certainly into his childhood. His transformation of the silent comedy into an avant-garde picaresque influenced much of what Ron Rice and Robert Nelson did, following him with increased liberation, even anarchy.

Broughton was no anarchist. It is significant that he linked the names of Freud and the Lumières; for, although he was deeply committed to Jungian, rather than Freudian, psychoanalysis, the nostalgia for the origins of cinema is fused in his work with an ironic quest for the origin of his own psychic development. His films are all tempered with a view of the cyclic and ritualistic nature of human events and antagonisms, but one must see his works of the late sixties and early seventies, where ritual becomes explicit, elliptical shifts become extreme, and the sexual quest becomes more immediate, to isolate these elements in the earlier films. In *Four in the Afternoon* (1951), he showed four vignettes, each built around a single image with a verse soundtrack. He outlined the organization in a note:

> A quartet for poems moving
> A film in four movements
> Each movement is a variation on the same theme
> The movements are at four ages and four stages
> 1. the girl of 10
> 2. the lad of 20
> 3. the woman of 30
> 4. the man of 40
> Each movement is in itself a poetic movement
> Each movement blends its movement with music and verse.[18]

In a more elaborate series of notes he assigned musical terms to the four parts: "Game Little Gladys," *Allegro*; "The Gardener's Son," *Adagio*; "Princess Printemps," *Scherzo*; "The Aging Balletomane," *Lento*. The entire film derives from his book of poems, *Musical Chairs*.

For each of the four film poems there is a distinctive cinematic trope; with "Game Little Gladys" it is stop-motion manifestation and disappearance of possible lovers; in the case of "The Gardener's Son" it is a composition-in-depth with the boy in the foreground and the women he desires in the background. At one point he comes towards the camera, walking barefoot almost in slow motion, as a blonde girl passes him walking in the opposite direction. We never see her face. As she recedes, he

turns to watch her go. A statue of Venus is cut into this scene. Later we see him in the foreground spying on three girls dancing like the Graces in a clearing.

The success of this episode, like the weakness of the subsequent one, "Princess Printemps," is a matter of *mise-en-scène*. It is the successful organization of movement with an emotional vector. In the autobiographical sketch I have already quoted from, he says, "I have learned more about the writing of poetry from music than from literature. And more about the making of films from dance than from cinema."

The final section, "The Aging Balletomane," may be the finest. In a rocking chair looking out upon a lower-class backyard with tiers of laundry hanging out to dry, the has-been dancer, who seems much older than the forty years the film-maker assigns to him for the symmetry of his outline, rocks in slow motion conjuring up a magical reverie with opera glasses instead of a wand. Reverse motion is the trope of this episode, a natural choice of mechanics for unrolling the past. So in a backward leap a ballerina floats onto the pedestal before him; she performs the reverse of a series of classic movements, as the old man, in a series of slow-motion leaps following the trajectory of his rocking, tries to approach her. She dissolves away before he can touch her. Then we see him running backwards into his chair twice, either to reinvoke her or to taste the sweetness of his apparition.

This film is a crucial case of the junction of verse and film within the American avant-garde. It is unfortunate that Broughton himself was not present at the famous Cinema 16 discussion of the fusion of these two modes on October 28, 1953. The text of the discussion between Willard Maas, Maya Deren, Parker Tyler, Arthur Miller, and Dylan Thomas has been printed in *Film Culture* and in the *Film Culture Reader*. Thomas and Miller were not prepared to contribute significantly; but for Maya Deren it was an occasion to make a theoretical statement which throws a great deal of light on the aspirations of poets making cinema in the 1950s. She set out to define the essence of poetry:

> The distinction of poetry is its construction (what I mean by "a poetic structure"), and the poetic construct arises from the fact, if you will, that it is a "vertical" investigation of a situation, in that it probes the ramifications of the moment, and is concerned with its qualities and its depth, so that you have poetry concerned, in a sense, not with what is occurring but with what it feels like or what it means. A poem, to my mind, creates visible or auditory forms for something that is invisible, which is the feeling, or the emotion, or the metaphysical content of the movement. Now it also may include action, but its attack is what I would call the "vertical" attack, and this may be a little bit clearer if you will contrast it to what I would call the "horizontal" attack of drama, which is concerned with the develop-

> ment, let's say, within a very small situation from feeling to feeling. Perhaps it would be made most clear if you take a Shakespearean work that combines the two movements. In Shakespeare, you have the drama moving forward on a "horizontal" plane of development, of one circumstance—one action—leading to another, and this delineates the character. Every once and a while, however, he arrives at a point of action where he wants to illuminate the meaning to *this* movement of drama, and, at that moment, he builds a pyramid or investigates it "vertically," if you will, so that you have a "horizontal" development with periodic "vertical" investigations, which are the poems, which are the monologues.[19]

Her examples within the avant-garde film were both from Willard Maas's films:

> It's things of this sort that, I believe, occur in the work of Mr. Maas, who has done that to a certain extent in his last film, *Image in the Snow*, where the development of the film is very largely "horizontal," that is, there is a story line, but this is illuminated constantly by the poetic commentary so that you have two actions going on simultaneously. Now this, I think, is one of the great potentials of film and something that could very well be carried and developed much further, and I think that one of the distinctions of that film and also of *Geography of the Body*, is that it combines these principles. I think that this is a way of handling poetry and film, *and* poetry *in* film.[20]

In the earlier of these two films, *Geography of the Body* (1943), Maas, his wife Marie Menken, and the poet George Barker filmed details of each other's bodies with dime-store magnifying glasses taped to a 16mm camera that the animator Francis Lee had left with them when he entered the army. Barker wrote and recited a surrealistic poem for the film. Its allusions to exotic and mystical travels suggest, with the synchronized concurrence of images from ambiguously defined zones of the body, the image of the body as a landscape and as a continent.

A few simple observations can be made now, in the light of historical perspective, on the emergence of the film with poetic commentary in the forties and fifties, and its disappearance in the late sixties. In the first place, the idea of a complex rendering of the momentary experience provides us with a central clue. By 1953 Maya Deren had started to use sound in her films and was considering cross-cultural visual analogies as a means of probing the moment in depth. As usual, she was forecasting what would happen years later, as will be evident in my discussions of Kenneth Anger and Stan Brakhage in the 1960s. At another point in the same discussion she gave the following example about sound:

> And so, in that sense, they would be redundant in film if they were used as a further projection from the image. However, if they were brought in on a different level, not issuing from the image, which should be complete in itself, but as another dimension relating to it, then it is the two things together that make the poem. It's almost as if you were standing at a window and looking out into the street, and there are children playing hopscotch. Well, that's your visual experience. Behind you, in the room, are women discussing hats or something, and that's your auditory experience. You stand at the place where these two come together by virtue of your presence. What relates these two moments is your position in relation to the two of them. They don't know about each other, and so you stand by the window and have a sense of afternoon, which is neither the children in the street nor the women talking behind you but a curious combination of both, and that is your resultant image, do you see?[21]

In Broughton's next film, *Loony Tom, the Happy Lover*, a Chaplinesque elf-man skips through fields, farms, and estates, kissing and chasing women and bringing lovers together. Tom's sing-song poem bursts in on the film as an ecstatic nursery rhyme, a subjective hallelujah where gesture cannot reach. This film is an appendix to *Four in the Afternoon* and a homage to the silent comedy.

The visionary film-maker in America does not go on quietly doing his work indifferent to considerations of exhibition, distribution, and response, even though that may be his goal. The crisis that Peterson faced in 1950, when he decided to try to make a documentary, Broughton encountered two years later. It took a form traditional to American artists—extended exile in Europe. One can say that the deflection of Art in Cinema away from the exhibition of "experimental" films in the early 1950s accelerated the break-up of the film-making nucleus in San Francisco. But beyond the local factors, there was the sheer economic struggle of raising even enough money for the most minimal productions, which made it next to impossible for aspiring film-makers to see a future of self-produced work.

In England, with the help of his friends Lindsay Anderson and Basil Wright, Broughton obtained financing for a 35mm feature film, *The Pleasure Garden* (1953), based on the materials of his earlier films but with an obvious dramatic structure. The success and failure of *The Pleasure Garden* itself is a topic beyond the scope of this book. What interests us is the effect it had on the film-maker. It almost ended his career. In his own words, it "spoiled" him for any low-budget production after that.

In 1961 Broughton married. It was an extravagant, eclectic ceremony performed by the writer and onetime priest Alan Watts, following a civil

service in San Francisco's City Hall, and preceding a sea ritual of Broughton's invention. He asked Stan Brakhage to record all the ceremonies on film as a keepsake. At that time Broughton had definitively given up film-making. Two years later, when he was at Knokke-le-Zoute, Belgium, as a judge for the third International Experimental Film Competition he still had no plans to edit the wedding footage or to make a new film, unless by a stroke of good fortune he were to receive one of fifteen grants of ten thousand dollars which the Ford Foundation was offering film-makers that year. He did not get one. Only Kenneth Anger, of the film-makers discussed here, received one, although almost all applied.

When Jacques Ledoux, the director of the Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique and organizer of the Experimental Film Competition, came to the United States in 1967 to seek films for the next festival, he conceived the idea of giving a small amount of color film stock to a number of previous participants in the hope that they would make new films for his festival. Broughton responded to the challenge. He engaged William Desloge as a cameraman and made *The Bed* (1967).

In form it is another picaresque romp, asking, "What can happen to and on a bed?," with overtones of the short cycle of man's life as opposed to the life of the human species. The first of many naked people to occupy the wandering bed represents Adam; through stop motion, Eve is born at his side. In slow motion they chase each other. Jump-cuts breaking their graceful motion—this is the most balletic of his films and is very diversified in terms of its internal motions compared with his earlier works—they move offscreen, to return just before the end. Pan appears; he plays a saxophone in a tree to charm the bed. Then Broughton himself sits on the mattress in a lotus position contemplating a snake. Another man, in slow motion, leaps over the bed, with a movement that recalls *Choreography for Camera* and makes explicit the debt that he had been acknowledging for years.

The tableaux and brief scenes are extensive: a wedding party, a cowboy sleeping in his boots, an ancient couple, a naked woman and a motorcyclist, a somnambulist who rides off on a horse, a ball game, a card game, pot smoking, faun and satyr, a black odalisque, a doctor who becomes a priest to administer last rites, Death, numerous sexual arrangements, men and women together, men and men, two men and a woman, an androgyne. At the end of the film Adam and Eve return; the film-maker and his snake appear again; then the empty bed departs across the field as it came.

There are no words with this film; only the music of Warner Jepson. The poem had disappeared as a possible soundtrack for avant-garde films in the late 1950s. One of its functions, the presentation of the first person, had been usurped by camera perspectives and associational montage. The most ardent exponent of contemporary poetry as a guide to film construction, Stan Brakhage, argued that cinema should elaborate its poetics in the field of the visual.

Broughton himself is one of the exceptions who continued to use the poetic voice into the seventies. *The Bed* had been unusual for him. In *Nuptiae* (1969) he utilized fragments of the marriage service and a song he wrote for the occasion. *The Golden Positions* (1970) combines spoken text with songs and choral odes;[22] *This Is It* (1971), more than any other film of Broughton's, depends fundamentally on the interactions of visual images and the ironic cosmological poem on its soundtrack; and finally, *Dreamwood* (1972) opens with a brief poem, defining the quest of that remarkable work, the last of the trance films.

Broughton's productivity since 1967 attests to his complete rebirth as a film-maker. Although *The Bed* did not gain a prize at the festival for which it had been made, it had an unusual success for an avant-garde film, in part because of its nudity and in part because of its gaiety. Its reception, which included some festival prizes and a brief commercial distribution, inspired and encouraged Broughton. He accepted a post teaching film and concentrated on the medium in a way that he had never done before. The fourteen years between *The Pleasure Garden* and *The Bed* had been a time of radical change in the situation of visionary film-makers. They were now teaching; they were distributing their films in cooperatives; some were receiving grants from major foundations; they were making more films than before; the film-maker had become the artist as hero, a role previously reserved for poets and painters in the United States.

In *The Golden Positions* Broughton refined the format of *The Bed* by increasing the number and the variety of the tableaux, by exploiting the tension between scenes of movement and of stillness, by organizing the brief scenes into thematic movements, and above all, by giving the whole film a rigorous structure—his most rigorous and complex since *Mother's Day*. As that first film had played with the form of the family album, *The Golden Positions* imitates the Mass, opening with a Gospel reading, which the film-maker calls "The Lesson" in his script, describing the three essential positions of "standing, sitting, and lying." The film begins with a navel in close-up. "Let us contemplate," Broughton speaks in liturgical tone as the camera zooms back to frame the whole naked male form. In the subsequent sections, "Anthem," "Creation of the Body," "A Short History of Art and Religion (Adam and Eve to Pieta)," "Secular Life," "Domestic Eroticon," and "Finale: The Positions of the Gods," Broughton playfully exhausts his repertoire of parodies of the human cycles.

This Is It is more concise and direct in its parody of cosmology than *The Golden Positions* had been of the Mass. Broughton's vehicle is a "home movie" of his son, Orion, playing naked with a large red ball in a yard. The camera first isolates the ball amid grass. "In the beginning it was already there," Broughton says on the soundtrack, and he continues his parody cosmology with other shots of the isolated ball, withholding the introduction of the child until the voice of God proclaims, "It needs something that looks more like Me." *This Is It* refuses to identify the

Tableaux from James Broughton's *Mother's Day* and *The Golden Positions*.

camera's perspective with the child's vision. It insists, in words and chants, on the absolute resignation of metaphysics to the present moment.

> This is it.
> This is really it.
> This is all there is.
> And it's perfect as it is.

As such, it is gently subversive of his friend Stan Brakhage's Romantic struggle with the loss of the primal vision of childhood and his subsequent attempt to reconcile that loss with imagination in a new cosmological and epistemological epic in his films from *Anticipation of the Night* (1958) to *Dog Star Man* (1961–1965). Broughton's strong attachment to Brakhage's work, a decisive factor in his return to film-making, leaves room for fundamental poetic disagreement.

At least as far back as the time of making *The Bed*, Broughton contemplated a serious attempt at mythopoeia. "The subject of *Dreamwood* had obsessed me for years," he wrote. "I first conceived shaping it as a variation on the Theseus myth." But once he started the film, with the help of a Guggenheim Foundation grant, he quickly replaced the scheme of the traditional myth with a quest of his own invention. *Dreamwood* alludes to several myths: Hippolytus, Apollo, Sisyphus, and Narcissus are seen passing in the background of different scenes, but these allusions become witty intrusions into the otherwise thoroughly personalized vision; they are, in fact, the only vestiges of the ironic self-mockery which abounds in all of Broughton's earlier films. As a total work, *Dreamwood* occupies the space between the trance film and the mythopoeic cinema, much as Maya Deren's *Ritual in Transfigured Time* had, but from the retrospective rather than the anticipatory position. No single film in the whole of the American avant-garde comes as close as this one to the source of the trance film, Cocteau's *Le Sang d'un Poète*.

The film begins with its hero in a spiritual crisis in his tower room. In pursuit of his vision of a female presence, he leaps from the tower. He follows an ominous couple to the end of a pier, and then is ferried alone across an expanse of water to an enchanted island where he endures terrible trials and undergoes a series of sexual initiations. Broughton's note on the film elaborates upon the events, but it also obscures the direct linearity of the film:

> DREAMWOOD: SCHEMATA
>
> The Poet in his tower, at an impasse.
> Out of dreams comes the Call to Adventure: his anima abducted by the First parents.
> Beginning of the Quest: the Night Sea Journey.
> The Other Shore: a strange bare island.

Before he can enter the Forest of Dreamwood he must pass three guardians of the mysteries:
the helpful Crone,
the Terrible Father-Mother of his past who would hold him back,
the Mother Superior of the forest who prepares him for entry.

FIRST INITIATION: the vision of the green chapel of the Goddess is disturbed by manifestations of nymphs & children, culminating in the encounter with Artemis bathing. For approaching her, he pays a price. Wakes up outside.

SECOND INITIATION: returning to the wood, he overcomes the Amazon guardian (Hippolyta). In the forest Alchemina has sport with him, to lead him deeper. Finally he encounters Lilith who takes who takes her pleasure with him. Out of the cold frenzy he wakes again outside the forest.

THIRD INITIATION: the guardian of the gate this time is a woodsman. In their encounter they discover they are "brothers." The woodsman takes the poet to the place where he may climb up to where the Old Queen Hecate dwells. Overcoming his fear, he enters her to be reborn. He survives this ordeal and this time awakens inside the forest.

FOURTH INITIATION: he finds himself again in the green chapel. This time it is welcoming and the presence of the Goddess is felt. She calls to him as to a lover. He disrobes and makes offerings to her, from his body. These are accepted, and he then makes love to her body, the Earth itself.

CODA: thanks to this union, his anima soul is contained within him. And this sacred marriage is blessed by sun and moon.[23]

The naming of the deities might suggest a complex mythography such as I shall describe in Kenneth Anger's *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* or Gregory Markopoulos's *The Illiac Passion*. In fact, the identification of the figures in Broughton's film is almost unimportant. The three sexual initiations are performed by a single actress in slightly different costumes. The axe murder of the hermaphrodite, the *sparagmos* of the hero by naked children, the lovemaking, the rebirth, the offerings of saliva, urine, feces, and sperm, and the final incorporation of the sun and the moon are so vividly and directly depicted in the film that their mythological analogues are superfluous.

Broughton employs a rhetoric of apparitions throughout the film. He generally achieves them by dissolving a new figure into a scene that has

already been set up. When the protagonist reaches the end of a pier, a rowboat and a Charon-like oarsman suddenly appear at his feet. The female presence, which the film-maker calls his "anima," sometimes appears through such a dissolve, but for the most part she is seen in sudden superimpositions. The apparitional quality is furthermore affirmed by the continual references to him as a dreamer. At the end of each major trial of initiation, as at the very beginning of the film and in the prelude to the tower episode, we suddenly find him waking from sleep. In those waking moments he is clothed, although just before we had seen him naked.

Cocteau froze time by showing his entire vision between two frames of a tower's collapse. Broughton undermines sequential time by dwelling on a black-and-white photograph during the initial scene in the tower. We discover at the end of the film that that photograph—of the Poet in the nude leaping with arms spread—was a still of the final image, his ecstatic leap commemorating the conclusion of his quest, the union of male and female within him. When he made his version of the trance film with such vitality in 1972, the film-maker too folded time and created the work which most clearly illuminates his films of twenty-five years earlier.

four

The Magus

KENNETH ANGER WAS born in southern California in 1930. According to his interviews, he played the role of the child prince in Max Reinhardt's movie of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and had Shirley Temple for a dancing partner at cotillions of the Maurice Kossloff Dancing School. For him more than for any other avant-garde film-maker Hollywood is both his matrix and the adversary. In his excellent article on Anger's films,[1] Tony Rayns cites the Olympian analogy from Anger's *Hollywood-Babylon*: "There was Venus and Adonis only called Clara and Rudy; there was Pan called Charlie; there was even old Bacchus named Fatty and maimed Vulcan named Lon. It was an illusion, a tease, a fraud; it was almost as much fun as the 'old-time religion'—without blood on the altars. But the blood would come." The ambivalent mixture of satire and homage with which that book is written amounts to an exercise in fascination characteristic of everything to which Anger devotes himself. Scandal, evil, violence, and Fascism, like Hollywood, are centers of fascination for

Anger, and his films are the fields in which the dialectic of that fascination is played and fought.

Of Anger's very early films there are no descriptions in print. Lewis Jacobs, in his contribution to *Experiment in the Film*, is our sole source of information about *Escape Episode*:

> Less concerned with cinematic form and more with human conflict are the pictures of Kenneth Anger. *Escape Episode* (1946) begins with a boy and girl parting at the edge of the sea. As the girl walks away she is watched by a woman from a plaster castle. The castle turns out to be a spiritualists' temple, the woman a medium and the girl's aunt. Both dominate and twist the girl's life until she is in despair. Finally in a gesture of defiance the girl invites the boy to the castle to sleep with her. The aunt informed by spirits becomes enraged and threatens divine retribution. The girl is frustrated, becomes bitter and resolves to escape.
>
> The quality of the film is unique and shows an extreme sensitivity to personal relationships. But because the thoughts, feelings and ideas of the film-maker are superior to his command of the medium, the effect is often fumbling and incomplete, with parts superior to the whole.[2]

Anger's notes on his films are often the best guide to their mysteries; in every case they are interesting. In *Film Culture 31*, he provided the following filmography of his work before *Fireworks*:

> WHO HAS BEEN ROCKING MY DREAMBOAT (1941)
>
> 7 min. 16mm B&W. Silent. Filmed in Santa Monica, California. *Credits:* Conceived, Directed, Photographed and Edited by Kenneth Anger. *Cast:* A dozen contemporaries recruited from the neighborhood. *Synopsis:* A montage of American children at play, drifting and dreaming, in the last summer before Pearl Harbor. Flash cuts of newsreel holocaust dart across their reverie. Fog invades the playground; the children dropping in mock death to make a misty landscape of dreamers.
>
> TINSEL TREE (1941–42)
>
> 3 min. 16mm B&W. Hand-tinted. Silent. Filmed in Santa Monica. *Credits:* Conceived, Directed, Photographed and Edited by Kenneth Anger. *Cast:* A Christmas Tree. *Synopsis:* The ritual dressing and destruction of the Christmas Tree. Close-ups as the branches are laden with baubles, draped with garlands, tossed with tinsel. Cut to the stripped discarded tree as it bursts into

brief furious flame (hand-tinted gold-scarlet) to leave a charred skeleton.

PRISONER OF MARS (1942)

11 min. 16mm B&W. Silent. Filmed in Santa Monica. *Credits:* Conceived, Directed, Photographed and Edited by Kenneth Anger. Camera Assistant: Charles Vreeland. Settings, Miniatures, and Costume Designed and Executed by Kenneth Anger. *Cast:* Kenneth Anger (The Boy-Elect from Earth). *Synopsis:* Science-Fiction rendering of the Minotaur myth. A "chosen" adolescent of the future is rocketed to Mars where he awakens in a labyrinth littered with the bones of his predecessors. Formal use of "serial chapter" aesthetic: begins and ends in a predicament.

THE NEST (1943)

20 min. 16mm B&W. Silent. Filmed in Santa Monica, Westwood and Beverly Hills. *Credits:* Conceived, Directed, Photographed and Edited by Kenneth Anger. *Cast:* Bob Jones (Brother); Jo Whittaker (Sister); Dare Harris—later known as John Derek in Hollywood—(Boy Friend). *Synopsis:* A brother and sister relate to mirrors and each other until a third party breaks the balance; seducing both into violence. Ablutions and the acts of dressing and making-up observed as magic rite. The binding spell of the sister-sorceress is banished by the brother who walks out.

ESCAPE EPISODE (1944)

35 min. 16mm B&W. Silent. Filmed in Santa Monica and Hollywood. *Credits:* Conceived, Directed, Photographed and Edited by Kenneth Anger. *Cast:* Marilyn Granas (The Girl); Bob Jones (The Boy); Nora Watson (The Guardian). *Synopsis:* Free rendering of the Andromeda myth. A crumbling, stucco-gothic sea-side monstrosity, serving as a Spiritualist Church. Imprisoned within, a girl at the mercy of a religious fanatic "dragon" awaits her deliverance by a beach-boy Perseus. Ultimately it is her own defiance which snaps the chain.

DRASTIC DEMISE (1945)

5 min. B&W. Silent. Filmed in Hollywood on V-J Day. *Credits:* Photographed and Edited by Kenneth Anger. *Cast:* Anonymous street crowds. *Synopsis:* A free-wheeling hand-held camera-plunge into the hallucinatory reality of a hysterical Hollywood Boulevard crowd celebrating War's End. A mushrooming cloud makes a final commentary.

ESCAPE EPISODE (SOUND VERSION) (1946)

27 min. Music by Scriabin.
This shorter edition makes non-realistic use of bird wind and surf sounds, as well as Scriabin's "Poem of Ecstasy" to heighten mood.[3]

The corpus of Anger's work I have selected begins with *Fireworks*. His note on it is cryptic; it assumes the viewer already knows the film!

FIREWORKS (1947)

15 min. 16mm B&W. Sound (Music by Respighi). Filmed in Hollywood. *Credits:* Conceived, Directed, Photographed and Edited by Kenneth Anger. Camera Assistant: Chester Kessler. *Cast:* Kenneth Anger (The Dreamer); Bill Seltzer (Bare-Chested Sailor); Gordon Gray (Body-Bearing Sailor); crowd of sailors. *Synopsis:* A dissatisfied dreamer awakes, goes out in the night seeking 'a light' and is drawn through the needle's eye. A dream of a dream, he returns to a bed less empty than before.[4]

As we watch the film we hear Anger speaking a prologue: "In *Fireworks* I released all the explosive pyrotechnics of a dream. Inflammable desires dampened by day under the cold water of consciousness are ignited that night by the libertarian matches of sleep, and burst forth in showers of shimmering incandescence. These imaginary displays provide a temporary relief."

The opening image is of water; a burning torch is dipped into it. Then there is a close-up of a sailor. As the camera dollies back from his face we see in flashes of illumination, like lightning, that he is holding the protagonist, the dreamer, in his arms. After a fade-out, the camera observes the same dreamer in bed. Another dolly movement shows he is alone. He stirs, wakes. A pan of the room reveals a marble or plaster hand with a broken finger. Images of the dreamer's hands moving on his own body suggest masturbation. We see in a long shot of the whole room that he has a monstrous erection under the covers. Then he takes out an African statue which breaks the phallic illusion. Photographs are scattered on the floor of the earlier shot of the sailor holding him. From these photographs it is clear that he is bruised and bloody.

Once he is out of bed, the camera pans up the dreamer's pants; he zips his fly just as the camera eye passes by; then to his face, framing a composition with the broken hand in the background. The camera follows him fluidly as he picks up the photos, throws them into the cold fireplace, and puts on his shirt. Another composition-in-depth frames the dreamer between the primitive phallic statue in the foreground and mirror in the far back as he takes out U.S. Navy matches. He leaves his room through a door marked GENTS in grotesquely large print.

The scene shifts as he passes through the door from compositions-in-depth, with regular camera movements, to fixed shots of the protagonist highlighted in black, formless space. A muscle-bound sailor appears before the painted backdrop of a bar. The dreamer approaches him and watches as he flexes his bare arm and chest muscles in close-ups. When the dreamer asks him for a light, the sailor punches him, knocks him off the screen, then twists his arm behind him. Suddenly, they are before the fireplace in the original room. The sailor takes a torch of sticks out of the fire and lights the cigarette for the dreamer. Then he picks up his cap and leaves.

Again the scene shifts to the dreamer highlighted against black. From above, the camera looks down on the hero, smoking. He turns abruptly and, in the next shot, sees a gang of sailors. They come at him, passing from light through darkness into light again. The camera follows their shadows. They rush him, carrying chains.

The following scene of orgasmic violence is constructed out of close-ups of the dreamer's body isolated in darkness and shots of the sailors performing violent acts just off screen. From above we see fingers shoved into the dreamer's nostrils, and blood shoots out of his nose and mouth. A sailor twists his arm, and he screams hysterically. A bottle of cream is smashed on the floor. With a broken piece a cut is made in his chest; hands separate the pudding-like flesh to reveal a heart like a gas meter. His chin is framed in the bottom of the black screen like a frozen wave. Cream poured from above flows over it into his mouth. Cream washes his bloody face; then it flows down his chest. There is a pan of empty urinals. The GENTS door opens, but no one is behind it. Then the sailor of the opening sequence appears; the camera dollies to his face in the reverse of its initial movement. In the next shot, he opens his fly and lights a roman candle phallus which shoots out burning sparks.

The fire of the roman candle becomes the flame of a wax candle on the tip of a Christmas tree which the dreamer wears like a giant hieratic helmet. He bows toward the camera, enters his room, and lights the photographs in the fireplace with the burning tree. We see him sleeping again, as in the opening. But now there is a fire in the fireplace; and a pan of the bed shows someone in it beside him. Scratches over the filmed images hide his face from us. The pan continues to the plaster hand, now repaired so that all its fingers are whole. The hand falls into the water, where the torch had been quenched in the first shot. "The End" appears in superimposition over the water.

Fireworks is a pure example of the psycho-dramatic trance film: the film-maker himself plays out a drama of psychological revelation; it is cast in the form of a dream beginning and ending with images of its hero as a sleeper; finally, the protagonist is the passive victim of the action of the film. Actually, there are two dreams in *Fireworks*. The first is the brief disjointed opening couplet of fiery images—the extinguishing of the torch in water and the dolly shot of the sailor holding the beaten dreamer amid flashes of lightning and peals of thunder. A slow fade-out, the only one in

(a)

(b)

The psychodramatic trance film: (a) Maya Deren in *Ritual in Transfigured Time*; (b) Kenneth Anger in *Fireworks*; (c) Stan Brakhage reflected in the metal of a toaster in *Flesh of Morning*; (d) Walter Newcomb in negative in Stan Brakhage's *The Way to Shadow Garden*.

(c)

(d)

the film, marks the end of this sequence, which we can presume to be a dream, because the subsequent image is of a sleeper; this is further confirmed a minute later when we see the pictures of the sailor and the dreamer scattered beside the bed, as if they were the objects of a masturbation fantasy before sleeping.

The day and night of the falsely wakened dreamer betray a dream structure before the final confirmation that the whole film has been a dream in the last images of the sleeper. The exaggerated GENTS sign; the substitution of a gas meter for a heart; the repeated sudden changes of

locale from barroom to fireside, from men's room back to bedroom are standard in the cinematic vocabulary of the dream. Finally, the dramatic substitution of a roman candle for a penis, from which the film derives its title, suggests that we have entered the mind of the sleeper rather than that the sleeper has awakened to the causal world.

Significantly, a photograph occupies a central and paradoxical position within the film as both the source and residue of the dream. If the opening passage of the protagonist held by the sailor, followed by the same protagonist waking, suggests that the former was his dream, the photograph by the side of his bed, showing the same image as the dream, appears to be the source of his nocturnal masturbation fantasy which had become "animated" in his sleep. Yet as the waking day proceeds, its mimesis veers towards ironic displacements: for a match, a bunch of burning sticks is substituted; for a heart, a metallic meter; for a penis, a roman candle; for semen, cream. What terminates the dream and allows us to see the sleeping figure unmediated by his own imagination is the burning of the very photograph that seemed to be the source of the dream. Here the space and time of the dream coincide with the duration of the photograph as a fetishistic object occupying the twilight area between an experience of dubious authenticity and the full awakening that is continually postponed.

The filmic dream constituted for Anger, as it had for Deren, a version of the perceptual model that generated most of the subjective films of the American avant-garde in the 1940s. Whenever that model is operating, a subject-object polarity is established in which the camera's relationship to the field of its view reflects the functions of a receptive mind to the objects of its perception. The metaphor of the dream permits the reflexive gesture of duplicating the presence of the film-maker (subject) or his mediator in front as well as behind the camera. The introduction of photographs or other iconic representations as objects of the camera's gaze merely adds another reflexive turn to the model without altering it. Thus *Mother's Day* postulates an organizing consciousness enmeshed in some variant of nostalgia. Likewise the anamorphosis of Peterson's films pointed to a radically askew perspective grounded in a fictional being within whom the psychological and intellectual tensions of each film converged.

There is a comic or satiric element in the hyperbolic symbolism of *Fireworks*, as in almost everything Anger makes. The roots of Anger's aesthetic lie in French Romantic decadence of the late nineteenth century. Like his predecessors, he favors an art which argues with itself. For him it is not a matter of vacillation. Anger makes his films with an intense involvement in his subject and often an equally intense criticism of their limitations. The simultaneity of the prophetic and the satiric distinguishes the greatest Romantic art, and the failure of the classically oriented taste and criticism of our times has been not to credit the Romantics with a sense of humor and to ridicule their achievements with the same ridicule they practiced on themselves. The crucial difference, of course, is that Romantic satire measures the limitations of its heroes in their quest for ab-

solute freedom, while classical taste calls even the limited movement toward those ends grotesque.

In *Fireworks*, poetic irony plays considerably less of a part than in all of Anger's later films. In *Scorpio Rising* it reaches its climax, as I shall show. *Fireworks* may be the strongest of the trance films. It is truly remarkable that a seventeen-year-old film-maker could make so intense an analysis of himself at a time when any allusion to homosexuality was taboo in the American cinema. But it is all the more remarkable that he invested his film with the critical humor of the false erection, the gas meter heart, the firecracker penis, and the Christmas tree miter. In 1947 Anger had not yet developed his feeling for the opposition of contraries or for total ambivalence as a structural principle in cinema. But the ironic sensibility had begun to manifest itself.

Later Anger wrote, "This flick is all I have to say about being seventeen, the United States Navy, American Christmas, and the Fourth of July."

Before we go on to consider his later films, I would like to call attention to certain textural properties of *Fireworks*. The opposition between scenes in depth, with prominent foreground and background objects, and scenes of figures isolated in blackness has been indicated in my synopsis. There is a considerable amount of camera movement early in the film. Each movement is very steady and is punctuated so as to distinguish two visual facts. The opening dolly shot shows first the sailor, then reveals that he is holding a bloody body in his arms. The dolly across the bed shows first that the dreamer is asleep, then that he is alone. The pan up his pants as he is getting dressed shows him zipping up his fly, then fixes his torso in relation to the broken hand in the background. The dolly at the end of the film has three phases; first the dreamer is back in bed; then there is someone beside him; and finally the broken hand is repaired.

It was a long time before he finished and released his next film, *Eaux D'Artifice* (1953). Its title might be translated "Water Works" ("Fireworks" would be "Feux d'Artifice" in French), suggesting the dialectical relation it has to the earlier film. Here we see the first mature development of the ironic sensibility and the balancing of contraries as a formal endeavor. One must not forget that although these two films are six years apart, Anger thinks of his films as a whole rather than as totally independent works. He is constantly revising them, subtly altering their relationships to one another. For the special program of his complete works at the Spring Equinox of 1966, he hand-tinted the candle atop the Christmas tree in *Fireworks* and the scratched-out face of the man in bed beside the dreamer to underline the relationship with *Eaux d'Artifice*, which ends soon after the appearance of a hand-tinted fan.

In *Eaux D'Artifice* we see a baroque maze of staircases, fountains, gargoyles, and balustrades. A figure in eighteenth-century costume, flowing dress, and high headpiece hurries through this environment while the camera zooms into and away from the mask-like faces of water spirits carved

in stone or studies in slow motion the fall of fountains and sprays. Just before the end of the film, the heroine flashes a fan, then turns into a fountain, and her silhouetted form dissolves into an identical fountain arrangement.

The entire film has a deep blue color, achieved in the printing through the use of a filter. The sole exception is the brief flashing of the fan which the film-maker tinted green by hand. The whole film is successfully tuned to a fugue by Vivaldi. Unlike *Fireworks*, its interest is not narrative, but primarily rhythmic, and its elements are the pace of the heroine, the speed of the zooms, the slowness of the retarded waterfalls, and above all, the montage in relation to the music.

In his early notes for the Cinema 16 catalogue, Anger describes this film as "the evocation of a Firbank heroine," and her flight as "the pursuit of the night moth." His new note is:

> EAUX D'ARTIFICE: SUMMER SOLSTICE 1953
>
> "Pour water on thyself: thus shalt thou be a Fountain to the universe. Find thou thyself in every Star! Achieve thou every possibility!" *Khaled Khan, The Heart of the Master, Theorem V.* Hide and seek in a nighttime labyrinth of levels, cascades, balustrades, grottoes, and ever-gushing, leaping fountains, until the Water Witch and the Fountain become One. Dedicated to Pavel Tchelitchew. *Credits:* Conceived, Directed, Photographed, and Edited by Kenneth Anger. *Cast:* Carmillo Salvatorelli (The Water Witch). *Music:* Vivaldi. Filmed in the gardens of the Villa D'Este, Tivoli, by special permission of the Italian Department of Antiquities, on Ferrania Infra-Red. Printed on Ektachrome through a Cyan filter. The Fan of Exorcism hand tinted by Kenneth Anger with Spectra Color.[5]

An earlier version of this note adds that Thad Lovett was the camera assistant and that the heroine's costume was designed by Anger.

Anger has said that he chose Carmillo Salvatorelli, a midget, for the part in order to create a play of scale. The allusion to Firbank in the earlier note can be traced to the end of Ronald Firbank's novel, *Valmouth*, where Niki-Esther, at the time of her marriage, went into the garden in pursuit of a butterfly, dressed in her wedding gown and carrying her bouquet.

According to Tony Rayns:

> Anger's grandmother was a costume mistress in silent films, and it was she who, working with Reinhardt, got Kenneth into the 1935 *Midsummer Night's Dream*. In his early youth Anger used to love dressing up in her costumes ("my transvestite period") and it was this that inspired the costume in *Eaux d'Artifice*, worn there by a circus dwarf Anger met in Italy. The

> Lady ("a Firbank heroine in pursuit of a nightmoth") owes her plumes to Anger's Reinhardt costume, and her light-headedness to her past in Anger's childhood.[6]

Eaux D'Artifice plays the same role in the evolution of Anger's style that *Choreography for Camera* played in Deren's. Both films are what I have labeled the single-image film, and both culminate in a union between protagonist and landscape. That Deren and Anger, as well as Curtis Harrington and Stan Brakhage in their generation of film-makers, should follow the same course of formal invention is not an indication that one copied the other; it shows, however, the options open to serious, independent film-makers. Furthermore, the achievement of one artist in a given form—say the trance film—did not exhaust that form for the others. Many of the film-makers of that generation went in similar directions in their work at different times. The sequence of forms discovered by Maya Deren in her six films between 1943 and 1958 started a pattern that extended from the late 1940s through the 1960s. To this parallel evolution of different film-makers I shall return repeatedly in this book.

Between the completion of *Fireworks* and of *Eaux D'Artifice* Anger had initiated many projects. In 1948 he attempted to make a feature-length color film about faded Hollywood stars and their fantasy mansions. Soon after that the footage for *The Love That Whirls*, with simulated Mexican rituals in the nude, was destroyed by the laboratory to which it was sent for processing because they deemed it obscene.

He moved to Paris in 1950, where he stayed on and off for the whole of that decade. There he began to shoot a 35mm black and white film called *La Lune des Lapins*, which he called "a lunar dream utilizing the classic pantomime figure of Pierrot in an encounter with a prankish, enchanted Magic Lantern," but he ran out of money. The next year, 1951, he filmed in 16mm a version of Cocteau's ballet, *Le Jeune Homme et La Mort*, in the hope of raising money to make a 35mm film of the whole ballet. That financial endeavor also failed.

For two years after that he prepared to film Lautréamont's *Les Chants de Maldoror*, again incorporating professional dancers from the Marquis de Cuevas's and Roland Petit's companies. He got no further in the production than rehearsals and tests. It was following the collapse of *Maldoror* that he made *Eaux D'Artifice*. A year later, in 1954, he returned to California to settle a family inheritance and made *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* with the money.

There have been at least four versions of *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* at different times. The first, which no one to my knowledge has seen, was edited to a soundtrack by Harry Partch, the American composer and inventor of several exotic instruments. The version that was in distribution in the late 1950s and up to 1966 had Janaček's *Glagolithic Mass* for a soundtrack. For the second Experimental Film Competition, held during the Brussels World's Fair of 1958, he made a version with three-

screen synchronous projection for the climactic final two-thirds of its forty minutes. In 1966 he issued his Sacred Mushroom version of the film, subtitled "Lord Shiva's Dream," at the occasion of his Spring Equinox program at the Film-Makers' Cinemathèque in New York. This version began with a reading of the whole of Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*, from which Anger derived the original title of the film, while still pictures of Aleister Crowley and images from the repertory of occult symbols and talismans appeared on the screen. To the first part of the film Anger had added some more photographs of Crowley in superimposition and images of the moon at strategic points. It was in the final third of the film, where once the images on two flanking screens had appeared, that he made his major changes. Superimposition, sometimes many layers deep, replaced the earlier linear development and montage. To the multiplication of his characters he added shots from Harry Lachman's *Dante's Inferno*, mainly crowd scenes of burning, printed in red, and most of *Puce Moment*, a fragment of the unmade *Puce Women*, which Anger had completed in 1949, distributed until 1963, and then withdrew from the public. He also mixed sounds of screaming with the music of Janaček, which he otherwise retained entirely.

The opening sequence of *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* is one of Anger's finest cinematic achievements. A slow pan up the title card, with gold letters and lines against black, blends into a slow pan up over the edge of a bed, suggesting the breaking of dawn. The camera passes a constellation of glittering crystalline objects too close to be in focus. As the pan continues to ascend we perceive that it is a string of jewels we have been looking at. Now they are being slowly raised and wrapped around the hands of a yet unseen figure on the bed.

A slow dissolve brings us closer to the hands, and the camera pans past them to the right to reveal a table with a pipe and several rings. This sequence continues for several minutes; most of the separate shots are joined by dissolves which underline the slow and hieratic quality of the gestures of the waking figure who, Anger tells us, is called Lord Shiva. He swallows the string of jewels, rises from the bed before an elaborate dragon mirror, passes through several doors and then beyond a Japanese curtain to perform his ritual cleansing before a three-sided mirror. It is here, as he leans forward to the mirror, that we see his first transformation: his face fades out, and we see a man-like beast with long fingernails filmed in red light. From Anger's notes, we know this is the hero's metamorphosis as Beast 666 of the Apocalypse, or simply the Great Beast.

The lavish color of the rooms; their exquisite ornamentation; the slow movements of the camera and of Shiva; his sensual handling of objects; and the slightly elliptical sequence of dissolves which both cuts short each action and blends it into the next combine with the opening of Janaček's *Mass* to create a sequence of excessive richness and to set an intense expectation for the film.

Another upward pan, somewhat faster than the opening shot, reveals a woman in brilliant white clothes and make-up with flaming red hair

isolated in blackness. She is Kali and the Scarlet Woman, according to Anger's notes. She turns her head to the right, then to the left, looking offscreen. In *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* the offscreen glance has the crucial function of relating the positions of the film's numerous characters to the central figures of Shiva and Kali. To a great extent the revisions of the Sacred Mushroom version have obscured this principle in the final third of the film, where superimposition has assumed the structural burden formerly based upon the geometry of offscreen looks and movements.

With the turn of her head the Scarlet Woman sees Shiva at his door. She turns again, and he has become the Great Beast. In a series of dissolves she discloses a tiny statue of a devil in her hands and offers it to him. In his hands it turns to fire. With that fire the Great Beast lights her cigarette, or "joint," for her. As she puffs it, we see a superimposed photograph in blue tint of Aleister Crowley smoking a pipe.

In the opening passage of the film, Anger used drapery, painted walls, and rich costumes as the instruments of color control and color rhythm. In the following scenes, in which Shiva in his several guises receives the gifts of the gods, Anger gets his essential color alterations from filtered lights with which he spotlights his figures in black space. This recalls the two kinds of lighting and evocation of space in *Fireworks* and the color control of *Eaux D'Artifice* achieved through filtering (in that case, in the printing of the film, not in the lighting of the scene as in *Inauguration*).

At this point in analyzing the film it would be useful to quote Anger's notes:

> INAUGURATION OF THE PLEASURE DOME
>
> Sacred Mushroom Edition Spring Equinox 1966
> otherwise known as 'Lord Shiva's Dream'
>
> "A Eucharist of some sort should most assuredly be consumed daily by every magician, and he should regard it as the main sustenance of his magical life. It is of more importance than any other magical ceremony, because it is a complete circle. The whole of the force expended is completely re-absorbed; yet the virtue is that vast gain represented by the abyss between Man and God.
>
> "The magician becomes filled with God, fed upon God, intoxicated with God. Little by little his body will become purified by the internal lustration of God; day by day his mortal frame, shedding its earthly elements, will become the very truth of the Temple of the Holy Ghost. Day by day matter is replaced by Spirit, the human by the divine; ultimately the change will be complete; God manifest in the flesh will be his name."—*The Master Therion (Aleister Crowley), Magick in Theory and Practice.*

> Lord Shiva. The Magician, wakes. A convocation of Theurgists in the guise of figures from mythology bearing gifts: The Scarlet Woman, Whore of Heaven, smokes a big fat joint; Astarte of the Moon brings the wings of snow: Pan bestows the bunch of Bacchus; Hecate offers the Sacred Mushroom, Yage. Wormwood Brew. The vintage of Hecate is poured: Pan's cup is poisoned by Lord Shiva. The *Orgia* ensues; a Magick masquerade party at which Pan is the prize. Lady Kali blesses the rites of the Children of the Light as Lord Shiva invokes the Godhead with the formula, "*Force and Fire*." Dedicated to the Few, and to Aleister Crowley; and to the Crowned and Conquering Child. *Credits:* Conceived, Directed, Photographed and Edited by Kenneth Anger. Costumes. Lighting and Make-up by Kenneth Anger. Properties and Setting courtesy Samson De Brier. *Cast*: Samson De Brier (Lord Shiva, Osiris, Cagliostro, Nero, The Great Beast 666); Cameron (The Scarlet Woman, Lady Kali); Kathryn Kadell (Isis); Renata Loome (Lilith); Anais Nin (Astarte); Kenneth Anger (Hecate); the late Peter Loome (Ganymede). *Music*: Janaček. Filmed at Shiva's house, Hollywood, California, and another place. Printed by Kenneth Anger in Hand Lithography System on A,B,C,D, and E rolls, on Ektachrome 7387.[7]

A note from the Cinema 16 New York premiere in 1956 gives a somewhat different synopsis of the same action:

> The Abbey of Thelema, the evening of the "sunset" of Crowleyanity. Lord Shiva wakes. Madam Satan presents the mandragore, and a glamor is cast. A convocation of enchantresses and theurgists. The idol is fed. Aphrodite presents the apple; Isis presents the serpent. Astarte descends with the witch-ball, the Fairy Geffe takes wing. The gesture of the Juggler invokes the Tarot Cups. The Elixir of Hecate is served by the Somnambulist. Pan's drink is venomed by Lord Shiva. The enchantment of Pan. Astarte withdraws with the glistening net of Love. The arrival of the Secret Chief. The Ceremonies of Consummation are presided over by the Great Beast-Shiva and the Scarlet Woman-Kali.[8]

In that cast of characters Aphrodite is played by Joan Whitney, the Somnambulist by Curtis Harrington, Renata Loome is called Sekmet (rather than Lilith), and Pan is listed as Paul Andre, although still other credits identify him as Paul Mathison, who also painted the title card.

The ambiguity of roles and synopses points out the inessential nature of the identifications. *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome*, like Deren's *The Very Eye of Night* and Markopoulos's *The Illiac Passion*, both made after it, is a mythographic film in its aspiration to visualize a plurality of gods. What is more important than the identification of characters in each of

these difficult films is the way in which the film-maker sustains a vision of the divine in cinematic terms. Both *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* and *The Illiac Passion*, with their multiplication of divinities and their resolution through a central figure, present versions of the primary Romantic myth of the fall of a unitary Man into separate, conflicting figures, a myth that dominates the prophetic writings of Blake and finds expression in the *Prometheus Unbound* of Shelley.

Each of the divine figures of the film offers a gift to Shiva in one of his forms after the lighting of the Scarlet Woman's "joint." The subsequent sequence, which parallels the dramatic entrances of Pan and Astarte, has a more complex structure. We see for the first time at this point the preview of a kind of superimposition that Anger employs repeatedly: two images, mirror inversions of each other, seen together. Later in his employment of this kind of superimposition of the Scarlet Woman, she will be seen looking both left and right, Janus-like.

With a gradual shift of interest, the emphatic entrance of Pan becomes the equally emphatic entrance of Astarte. She lowers her mesh-stockinged feet on to a fur cushion; Shiva unwinds her blue dress; as she lifts her arms over her head in a circular motion, passing momentarily out of screen, a pearl in her hand changes first into a silver ball, and then, with another revolution, into a silver globe suggesting the moon. She gives it to Shiva. In two dissolves the globe shrinks again into a pearl, and he swallows it like a pill. Suddenly he sprouts tiny wings and smiles effeminately.

In a scenic breakdown originally in French, presumably by Anger himself, of the three-screen version of the film, the action I have so far described represents the first act ("The Talisman") in three scenes:

scene 1	In the Abbey of Thelema, Lord Shiva wakes.
scene 2	The Goddess Kali presents the mandragore, and the enchantment begins.
scene 3	An assembly of magicians and theurgists transformed into Saints: Aphrodite, Isis, Lilith, Astarte offer their talisman, potent with the Powers of the Age of Horus: the God of Ecstasy and Violence, the God of Fire and Flame. Pan arrives bearing Hermes' gift.

That much of the film was to be on a single screen. The following two acts, of three and two scenes respectively, were on a triptych.

What Anger called the second act ("The Banquet of Poisons") begins as the Great Beast, with the Scarlet Woman beside him, snaps his fingers and Cesare, the Somnambulist, taken from Weine's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, appears behind his hand. The film-maker Curtis Harrington plays this role in white make-up and black tights. Like his prototype in the 1919 film, he walks stiffly with arms outstretched. The Beast points and the sleepwalker leaves the frame. The next shot, joined to the previous one by a dissolve, is one of the most impressive in the film: the Somnambulist

(a)

(b)

(c)

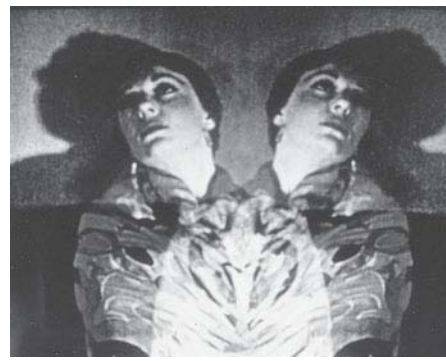
(d)

(a) Anger's *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome*: Lord Shiva eats the jewels.
(b) The Great Beast lights the "joint" of the Scarlet Woman, with a superimposition of Aleister Crowley.
(c) The arrival of Pan.
(d) Serving the elixir.

passes a row of candles and approaches a black wall, upon which are drawn Egyptian cats. As he nears the wall a passage opens in it, and he passes into a bright and silken sanctum where his zigzag movements are only occasionally glimpsed by the camera. In one of the later versions of the film, Anger has superimposed a cartoon of Crowley's face over the image so that the door opens not only to the sanctum but into Crowley's head.

Another dissolve brings us into the sanctum where Cesare takes an amphora from the masked figure of Hecate. He pours a powder-like substance from the amphora for the Beast and the Scarlet Woman. Shiva makes a magical gesture (Anger identified it as the Tarot of the Juggler) and two chalices rise by his sides. In this passage, the montage returns again and again to Shiva's eyes, glancing demonically from his green-tinted

(e)



(f)

(g)

(h)

(e) Pan poisoned.
(f) A mirror image superimposition from the *orgia*.
(g) Lady Kali blesses the rites before the fires of Hell.
(h) Lord Shiva invokes the godhead.

face. Soon the child Ganymede makes his first appearance, pouring drinks for Shiva, Pan, and Lilith, who are gathered in a single composition with three different tints—Shiva, purple, Pan, yellow, Lilith, red. Shiva pours poison into Pan's drink from the hidden chamber in his ring. Pan drinks and clutches his neck.

At this point the linear development of the film evaporates; the multiple superimposition begins. There are no more dissolves; the pace changes from slow to frenzied. Only at strategic moments, as will be pointed out, does a single image appear on the screen without superimposition.

Astarte unfolds her net over the changing images of gods and goddesses. Suddenly we see Pan, without superimposition, possessed by the poison. There is a fade-out. We return to a triple superimposition of Astarte dancing with her net over the images of the revelers. Then a veiled figure emerges from the sanctum over the superimposition of the gold and

black title card. Again the action returns to Astarte's dance, sometimes seen from three different camera depths simultaneously. Pan is attacked and beaten with feathers. The goddesses' feet kick and press his chest, while the first images of the hell fire of *Dante's Inferno* enter the texture of the film. This is the fated *sparagmos* for which the orgy was convened.

Then the Scarlet Woman appears in her manifestation as Kali, seated on a throne with one breast bare. The superimposition ceases as she surveys the scene. The hell fires shoot up behind her. Sometimes her image appears over that of Shiva whose hand gestures control the orgy; other times we see three different views of her at once.

The camera dollies in on the single image of the veiled figure dancing wildly. The pace of the zooms on the masked dancer increases with the intensity of Pan's *sparagmos* until, at the end of the film, Kali raises her hand in benediction, and Shiva smiles and gestures with his hands. After a montage of occult symbols, including a pentacle and the eye of Horus, the image fades out on a single shot of Shiva bringing his hands together.

Even with the introduction of superimposition, the disjunctive editing of the dances of Astarte and the masked figure and the introduction of material from two completely different films, the scenario of the Sacred Mushroom version is not so different from the outline of the three-screen projection, in which the three scenes of the second act ("The Banquet of Poisons") are,

scene 1 The Somnambulist brings the Elixir of Hecate. Communion of the Saints: "You are Holy; whose nature is unformed; You are holy, the great and powerful Master of light and darkness."
scene 2 The drink of Pan is poisoned by an aphrodisiac-initiatory powder that Shiva had hidden in a chamber of his ring. The intoxication of Pan.
scene 3 Astarte's return with the net of Love.

The third act ("The Ceremonies of Consummation") has two scenes:

scene 1 The arrival of the Secret Chief. The invocation of the Holy Fire. The Infinite Ritual.
scene 2 The ceremonies of consummation are presided over by Shiva and Kali, The Whore of Babylon and The Great Beast of the Apocalypse.

Anger told *Take One* magazine about the sources of this film in the work of Crowley:

> The film is derived from one of Crowley's dramatic rituals where people in the cult assume the identity of a god or a goddess. In other words, it's the equivalent of a masquerade party—

> they plan this for a whole year and on All Sabbaths Eve they come as the gods and goddesses that they have identified with and the whole thing is like an improvised happening.
>
> This is the actual thing the film is based on. In which the gods and goddesses interact and in *The Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* it's the legend of Bacchus that's the pivotal thing and it ends with the God being torn to pieces by the Bacchantes. This is the underlying thing. But rather than using a specific ritual, which would entail quite a lot of the spoken word as ritual does, I wanted to create a feeling of being carried into a world of wonder. And the use of color and phantasy is progressive; in other words, it expands, it becomes completely subjective—like when people take communion; and one sees it through their eyes.[9]

In a British newspaper, *Friends*, he spoke of the costumes of *Scorpio Rising*, with a relevance to the concerns here:

> Even in fancy dress films the people are still as I see them and how they see themselves. In Rio you have people who live in shanty towns and save up all year for the fab costume that they will wear for the Carnival, and that's what they live for the whole year. For that spangled moment: and during the Carnival when they're all dressed up, that's really them, it's not them when they are working, sweeping the street or doing somebody's washing.[10]

In a film of the complexity of *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* one has to turn from the film-maker's program notes to the myth of the film itself. Everything in the film, as it is now available in the Sacred Mushroom edition, must be measured in terms of the figure of the Magus. The essential tension of the film rests on the resolution of the Magus' several aspects into a unified, redeemed man, or man made god, to use Anger's terms. The final shot of the film is the turbanned Shiva completing the semicircular hand gesture he had been making throughout the climax of the film; the Magus' apotheosis, the Great Beast, Nero, Cagliostro, and the winged Geffe are reunited. Not only they, but all the actors of the film are subsumed in his power and glory. If, as Anger's remarks suggest, these characters are most themselves when assuming the *personae* of gods, they sacrifice their "spangled moment" to the central energy of the Magus; for *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* is not an apocalypse of liberated gods or chaotic demons, nor is it a perversion of the myth of Pentheus and Dionysus, in which the god is devoured, although Pan is as much the "eucharist" in this film as the potion of Hecate. What divinity the others obtain comes through the Magus.

For the spectator, the Sacred Mushroom version fuses the perspectives of Shiva with Pan. The opening of the film, with a solemnity and slowness of action suggestive of the traditional Japanese Noh and Kabuki theaters, dramatizes the hierophant's point of view. Immediately after the poisoning of Pan, the style switches to the delirium of the intoxicated god, with a punctuation of shots of Kali and Shiva from the sober perspective of control. Disregarding the notes again, we see that Shiva's most spectacular act is the transformation of the Scarlet. Woman into Kali when she reappears as the diabolic female in the superimposition sequence over the flames of hell. Ultimately, she too must be subsumed into the Magus.[11]

The recurrent theme of the American avant-garde film is the triumph of the imagination. Nowhere is this clearer than in the films of Anger. Here it triumphs over the superficiality of the masquerade, the campiness of the actors, and the shabbiness of Hollywood's reconstruction of Dante's hell. The opposition of the reality principle and the imagination, which I mentioned in discussing *Fireworks*, operates more covertly in this film. It is in his next completed work, *Scorpio Rising*, that this dialectical process reaches its maturity and becomes the organizing principle of the film.

There is nearly a decade between the two works. We do not know what formal evolution might have been shown in his version of *The Story of O*, which he prepared in the late fifties but never shot. In a history of ruined projects, stolen films, and works aborted due to insufficient funds, the abandonment of *The Story of O*, in part because one of the actors turned out to be involved in a kidnapping, reaches outrageous dimensions. In 1955 Anger managed to complete a documentary film of the erotic paintings Crowley made for his Thelema Abbey in Sicily, but that film is either lost or Anger does not want to show it. In 1960 J. J. Pauvert published his *Hollywood-Babylon*. In 1962 Anger returned to the United States, and while living in the Brooklyn apartment of the film-makers Willard Maas and Marie Menken, began to make *Scorpio Rising*.

Scorpio Rising is built around the ironic interaction of thirteen popular songs with the same number of schematic episodes in the life of a motorcycle gang. The quotation from Crowley with which Anger prefaces his note to the film refers to his use of the songs:

> It may be conceded in any case that *the long strings of formidable words which roar and moan through so many conjurations have a real effect in exalting the consciousness of the magician to the proper pitch*—that they should do so is no more extraordinary than music of any kind should do so.
>
> Magicians have not confined themselves to the use of the human voice. The pan-pipe with its seven stops, corresponding to the seven planets, the bull-roarer, the tom-tom, and even the violin, have all been used, as well as many others, of which the most important is the bell, though this is used not so much for actual conjuration as to mark stages in the ceremony. Of all

these the tom-tom will be found the most generally useful. (*The Master Therion, Magick in Theory and Practice.*)

The body of the note divides the film into four parts:

> A conjuration of the Presiding Princes, Angels, and Spirits of the Sphere of MARS, formed as a "high" view of the Myth of the American Motorcyclist. The Power Machine seen as tribal totem, from toy to terror. Thanatos in chrome and black leather and bursting jeans. *Part I:* Boys & Bolts: (masculine fascination with the Thing that Goes). *Part II:* Image Maker (getting high on heroes: Dean's Rebel and Brando's Johnny: the True View of J. C.). *Part III:* Walpurgis Party (J. C. wallflower at cycler's Sabbath). *Part IV:* Rebel Rouser (The Gathering of the Dark Legions, with a message from Our Sponsor). Dedicated to Jack Parsons, Victor Childe, Jim Powers, James Dean, T. E. Lawrence, Hart Crane, Kurt Mann, The Society of Spartans, The Hell's Angels, and all overgrown boys who will ever follow the whistle of Love's brother. *Credits:* Conceived, Directed, Photographed, and Edited by Kenneth Anger. *Cast:* Bruce Byron (Scorpio); Johnny Sapienza (Taurus); Frank Carifi (Leo); John Palone (Pinstripe); Ernie Allo (The Life of the Party); Barry Rubin (Pledge); Steve Crandell (The Sissy Cyclist). *Music:* Songs interpreted by Ricky Nelson, Little Peggy March, The Angels, Bobby Vinton, Elvis Presley, Ray Charles, The Crystals, The Ron-Dells, Kris Jensen, Claudine Clark, Gene McDaniels, The Surfaris. Filmed in Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Walden's Pond, New York, on Ektachrome ER.[12]

With *Scorpio Rising* Anger began to refer to some of his films as "Puck Productions." A credit with that name appears before anything else in the film. On it we see a Bottom-like ass with a banner reading, "What Fools these Mortals Be," a reference not only to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* but also to Anger's own childhood performance in the Max Reinhardt film version. In the penultimate section of *Scorpio*, as the motorcycle race is in full swing, we see a brief shot of Mickey Rooney, as Reinhardt's Puck, cut into the film as if he were cheering on the riders. In this brief instance of the injection of the image from the Hollywood film into the action of his own film, Anger establishes a series of intellectual vibrations which reach to the core of his dialectical vision. In the present case, we are struck first by the wit of the juncture; then, as we remember the antics of Shakespeare's Puck, we realize that he is cheering them on to their deaths; and finally, we recognize the ironic loss of intensity implicit in the use of Hollywood's, not Shakespeare's, Puck.

The lyrics of the songs—ironic because they are "found objects" from popular culture—comment upon and qualify our thoughts about the visual

images. The intensity and complexity of the ironies vary greatly from song to song; nevertheless, the end of one song and the beginning of another is a dramatic highlight at every transition, and the spectator awaits eagerly the detonating image which will fuse the next song to the next episode.

Each of the thirteen sections has a comic highlight or a dramatic surprise. Often the very first shot of a new sequence marks a visual collision with what we have been watching; often Anger holds his punch shot half a minute until the central phrase of the song's lyrics has been uttered so that the interaction of picture and sound will be synchronous. The force with which he achieves this is concentrated in the central episodes of the film.

The first four sections of *Scorpio Rising* form an introduction to the film. From the very first shots—the unveiling of a motorcycle in a garage, then a series of horizontal and vertical pans of bike parts, lights, shining chrome fenders, young men oiling gears—it is clear that the texture of the film is unlike anything Anger has done before. This is a film almost without superimposition, filtered lights, or isolated figures in blackness. Anger still uses the coordination of the offscreen look, especially in collaging foreign material. The low-key lighting makes possible a lush pastel view of motorcycle cushions, lights, and portions of chrome with stars of light reflecting off them. As usual the camera movements are steady and slow, but the rhythm of the film as a whole is much quicker than anything Anger had ever made before.

The comic moment of the first scene comes at its end. Framed by quick zooms in on a plaster scorpion, the back of a cyclist rises before a red wall, and as he ascends, we can gradually read the title *Scorpio Rising* spelled out in silver studs on the back of his leather jacket. When he is standing erect, we see "Kenneth Anger" studded at the belt line. He turns around, revealing his bare chest and navel as the song and episode end. The subsequent segment simply prolongs a single metaphor: the montage compares motorcyclists tightening bolts to a child winding up three toy cycles and letting them roll at the camera. The song "Wind-Up Doll" underlines the comparison.

The unveiling, greasing, shining, and completing of the motorcycles in the introductory series of episodes exaggerate the preparatory stage of the film, a stage which has always been important for Anger, as in the waking and costuming sections of *Fireworks* and *Inauguration*, and suggest that a climactic show-down is forthcoming. The first intimation of disaster occurs in the third episode, also of motorcycle polishing and fitting, which opens and closes with views of a Grim Reaper skeleton in a black velvet hood surveying the cyclist and his machine. We hear the threatening lyrics of the song, "My boyfriend's back and there's gonna be trouble. . . ."

Anger once described his finding the fourth song as an example of "magick." He said that he had completed the selection for all the other songs and needed something to go with this episode, in which three cyclists at different locations ritually dress themselves in leather and chains with

the montage continually jumping from one to the other. Anger turned on his radio and exercised his will. Out came Bobby Vinton's "She wore blue velvet," which when joined to the episode created precisely the sexual ambiguity Anger wanted in this scene. In fact, there is a brief cut in the middle of the episode as one bare-chested cyclist leans forward toward the camera and the image switches to the crotch of another as he zips his pants, suggesting fellatio. Similar eroticized montages occur later in the film, as when the hero kisses the plaster scorpion, his totem, for good luck, and the image quickly cuts to the bare navel of another cyclist.

The next four song-episodes, forming the second part of the film or "The Image Maker," as the notes call it, comprise its core and culminate in the "Heat Wave" and "He's a Rebel" episodes, which represent Anger's clearest and most intricate thought on the dialectics of reality and imagination. The previous part had ended as a fully-dressed cyclist wheeled his bike out of the garage. The sudden appearance on the screen of a frame of Li'l Abner comics introduces Scorpio, the hero of the film. We see him lying in bed reading the funnies as Elvis Presley sings "You look like an angel, but you're the devil in disguise." His room is a vast metaphor; its walls exhibit a virtual catalogue of his unconscious, in the same way that the cluttered walls of many American adolescents, where everything meaningful to them is tacked and pasted, represent the contents of the unconscious. Thus, without resorting to expressionism, as in the GENTS room of *Fireworks*, Anger shows us an iconographic space that is also a real space. On the walls are pictures of James Dean, Marlon Brando, and a Nazi swastika. There is also a television, turned on through the series of episodes in this room. It functions as an aesthetic reactor. Whatever we glimpse on it is always a metaphor for what is happening within the hero of the film. Its metaphoric level extends simultaneously as an aesthetic dimension of Scorpio's thought and action in the realm of plastic illusion and as an icon of contemporary life—the source as well as the reflection of the unconscious. It is from the images on this television that Anger gets his most interesting collage effects.

After his own ritual costuming to the sound of "Hit the Road, Jack," ending in his putting on rings quite like the opening of *Inauguration*, Scorpio takes a sniff of a drug, perhaps "crystal meth" or cocaine. Here we have an exultant image of Romantic liberation when the most interiorized of the songs in the film, "Heat Wave," is combined with an image on the television of birds escaping from a cage, and then, amid two-frame flashes of bright red, a gaudy, purple picture of Dracula. We see in one or two seconds of cinema the re-creation of a high Romantic, or Byronic myth of the paradox of liberation. This brief montage evokes both tremendous liberation and tremendous limitation; the liberation inherent in the exuberant enthusiasm of the editing and the ecstatic pace of the music, and the simultaneous limitation in that the sudden "ace of light," as Michael McClure calls a sniff of cocaine, comes from a bottle and a powder; it is exterior. The image of the monster is just a gaudy photograph, and the

freed birds are in the end just a couple of pigeons on television. Although I have to describe these contradictory aspects of the cinematic experience sequentially, they occur simultaneously in watching the film.

From this point on, the entire film is structured around the interaction of contraries. In the "Heat Wave" episode the initial flash from the drug blends into images of his heroes. Scorpio is intercut with photos of James Dean. Marlon Brando appears on the television, in his motorcycle film, *The Wild One*. When we catch sight of him he has an interiorized smile, his eyes are closed, and he too seems to have just sniffed cocaine. When Scorpio puts on his jacket, we see the skull on the back of Brando's.[13]

At the end of the scene, Scorpio repudiates his heroes; for Anger's vision of the myth of the American motorcyclist argues passionately with the tepid social morality of Brando's and Dean's films. Next to the Promethean Scorpio, they are "bad boys" from Boys' Town. So Scorpio draws his gun on a still of Gary Cooper from the show-down in *High Noon*, and he points it into the television, but Brando is no longer there; instead we see first a Hebrew menorah and then a crucifix as the objects of his attack. At this point he kisses the scorpion and leaves his room.

In the course of the film there is a transition from minor to major heroes, from movie stars to the charismatic powers who have shaken the world. The first example, which we meet in the coming episode, is Christ; the second, later, is Hitler. The gunning of the menorah and the crucifix established the context of interpretation for the following sequence. As the camera follows the boots of the hero through the street to the music of "He's a rebel, and we'll never know the reason why," we are prepared for the comic highlight of the film. From Family Films's *The Road to Jerusalem*, we see Christ parading past his followers. Like the heroes in photographs and on television, this Christ comes to us at one remove. The space abruptly shifts from the colored scenes of Anger's photography to a flat, blue-tinted black-and-white image in the intercuttings. True to the high Romantic tradition, of which Anger himself may be only dimly aware, the heroic Christ is wrenched from the traditional Christian interpretation. Through the montage we learn what Scorpio would do if he were Christ, or perhaps what he thinks Christ really must have done: when Christ approaches the blind beggar, Scorpio would have kicked him, as he kicks the wheel of his motorcycle, and would have given him a ticket for loitering, as a cop places a parking violation on the bike; Christ touches the blind man's eyes; through a very quick intercut we see that Scorpio would have shown him a "dirty picture"; and when the beggar goes down on his knees before Christ, Scorpio offers him his stiff penis.

Scorpio Rising is a mythographic film. It self-consciously creates its own myth of the motorcyclist by comparison with other myths: the dead movie star, Dean; the live one, Brando; the savior of men, Christ; the villain of men, Hitler. Each of these myths is evoked in ambiguity, without moralizing. From the photos of Hitler and a Nazi soldier and from the use of swastikas and other Nazi impedimenta, Scorpio derives ecstasy of

will and power. *Scorpio Rising* is a more sophisticated version than Anger had ever before achieved of the erotic dialogue. In this film he is no longer describing the visionary search for the self, as he had in *Inauguration*, but presenting an erotic version of the contraries of the self.

In all but the last of the remaining five song-episodes, Anger continues to compare motorcyclists to Family Films's Christ. Flashing lights in the spokes of a motorcycle introduce the "Walpurgis Party." Here, to the music of "Party Lights," the cyclists come in costume. One wears a skeleton suit through which his penis protrudes. Their entry is meshed with a procession of Hollywood disciples obsequiously accepting the invitation to enter a house. When Christ himself is seated, the song changes to "Torture" and his offscreen looks are intercut with the party to give the impression that he is supervising the members of the gang who have started to smear hot mustard on the bare crotch of one of their comrades. Scorpio has arrived at the party, but he quickly leaves to explore, with a phallically placed flashlight, a church altar, draped with a Nazi flag.

In the party episodes the camera movement is looser and faster than anywhere else in Anger's work. In hand-held sweeps, it follows the pranks of the cyclists—dropping their pants, poking a woman with a bare penis, slapping each others' asses like a tom-tom, sending someone pantless on his cycle out into the night, and pouring on the mustard. Toward the end of the "Torture" section, the camera regains its calm horizontal and vertical panning. A ceramic of Christ's face passes the screen. Scorpio points downward from the altar, and the camera, following his finger, shows us quivering buttocks brutally beaten. In the initial version of the film, which has undergone very few important changes, a shot of a plastic bottle of "Leather Queen" stood where the sadistic image now appears.

In the final three sections of the film, Scorpio, still standing on the altar which he progressively desecrates, directs a motorcycle race in an open field. As the cyclists rev up their bikes at the starting line, Christ is hoisted onto a donkey side-saddle. It is "The Point of No Return," as the accompanying song tells us. The hero, in a black leather mask with a Luger in one hand and a skull and crossbones flag in the other, signals the riders on. The one superimposition of the film occurs when the image of the scorpion hovers behind the waving death flag. In the second part of the race, to the song, "I will follow him," Scorpio reaches the height of his demonic possession. The montage suggests that he is a diabolical Puck in a collage previously discussed. Before pictures of Hitler and pans over Nazi parade troops, he urinates in his helmet and holds it high on the altar as his offering. Then he kicks books off the altar and leaves in the night.

A pastel sketch opens the final scene. It is a skeleton head smoking a cigarette labeled "Youth." At the sound of a cash register or a slot machine, a picture of Christ guiding a clean-cut young man appears in the skeleton's eye socket. "Wipe Out" is the last song. The images are the most abstract of the film: a montage of Nazi pictures, flags, even swastika checkers. Briefly we see Scorpio with a submachine gun shouting orders.

A cyclist crashes in the race and presumably dies. The final images of the film show a red flickering police car light rhythmically intercut with the face of a cyclist filmed in infra-red so that he too is red against a black background. The end title is written in studs on a leather belt.

Tony Rayns, in his analysis of the film,[14] says that Scorpio is the motorcyclist who dies. I see no evidence for this. The death is the sacrifice that Scorpio demands. It, and not the winning of a race, has been the obvious culmination of the film from the beginning, as Pan's *sparagmos* had been needed to inaugurate the pleasure dome.

In Anger's booklet of notes on the Magick Lantern Cycle of 1966 he provided the following schematic autobiography:

Sun Sign Aquarian
Rising Sign Scorpio
Ruling Planet Uranus
Energy Component Mars in Taurus
Type Fixed Air
Lifework MAGICK
Magical Weapon Cinematograph
Religion Thelemite
Deity Horus the Avenger; The Crowned and Conquering Child
Magical Motto "Force and Fire"
Holy Guardian Angel MI-CA-EL
Affinity Geburah
Familiar Mongoose
Antipathy Saturn and all His Works
Characteristic Left-handed fanatic craftsman
Politics Reunion with England
Hobbies Hexing enemies; tap dancing; Astral projection; travel; talisman manufacture; Astrology; Tarot Cards; Collage
Heroes Flash Gordon; Lautreamont; William Beckford; Méliès; Alfred C. Kinsey; Aleister Crowley
Library Big Little Books; L. Frank Baum; M. P. Shiel; Aleister Crowley
Sightings Several saucers; the most recent a lode-craft over Hayes and Harlington, England, February 1966
Ambitions Many, many, many more films; Space travel
Magical numbers 11; 31; 93[15]

Formally, *Scorpio Rising*'s precursor (by a few years at most) was Bruce Conner's second film, *Cosmic Ray*. Whether or not Anger had seen the film is hardly relevant here, as I can hardly believe it had a direct influence upon him. Nevertheless, Conner should be credited as the first film-maker to employ ironically a popular song as the structural unit in a collage film. The title of his film is a pun, referring both to Ray Charles, whose song "Tell me what I say" forms the sound track of the film, as

well as to atomic particles from outer space. Conner intercut material which is primarily the irreverent dance of a naked woman, which he photographed himself, with stock shots from old war films, advertisements, a western, a Mickey Mouse cartoon, etc., ridiculing warfare as a sexual sublimation. The structure of the ideas evoked by Conner's collage is straightforward; unlike Anger's film, there is little room for ambiguity in *Cosmic Ray*.

In the sequence of Anger's films, there is an evolution of forms from the late forties through the sixties which will recur again and again in the works of his contemporaries. The shift is from the trance film to the mythopoeic film. Both forms assert the primary of the imagination; the first through dream, the second through ritual and myth. Almost all of the filmmakers discussed so far in this book have moved through these two stages at almost the same time. The development of Maya Deren's formal concern with cinema had been from dream (*Meshes of the Afternoon*) to ritual (*Ritual in Transfigured Time*) and myth (*The Very Eye of Night*). The cases of Peterson and Broughton are exceptional; they do not fit the pattern neatly, but that is because the former stopped making films in 1949 and the latter left the medium for so long before returning to it.

Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome was the first major work to herald the emerging mythic form in the American avant-garde film. In its initial form, in 1954, it was closer to Maya Deren's concept of a cinematic ritual than to what would emerge in the 1960s as the mythopoeic cinema—*Scorpio Rising*, Markopoulos's *Twice a Man* (1963) and *The Illiac Passion* (1968), Brakhage's *Dog Star Man* (1961–1966), Harry Smith's *Heaven and Earth Magic* (approx. 1950–1960). In that early version the Kabuki-like pace of the opening part extended throughout the film; its formal operation was like the choreography in *Ritual in Transfigured Time*. After *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome*, the mythic form emerged in Deren's *The Very Eye of Night* (1958) and Maas's *Narcissus* (1958). In all three instances the film-makers sought to represent specific myths and mythological figures. The triumph of the mythopoeic film in the early sixties sprang from the film-makers' liberation from the repetition of traditional mythology and the enthusiasm with which they forged a cinematic form for the creation or revelation of new myths. *Scorpio Rising* is an excellent example of this new vitality.

Immediately after the success of *Scorpio Rising*, Anger tried to apply the very same formal invention to a similar theme, the custom car builder. Early in 1964 the Ford Foundation experimented with giving a few independent film-makers grants of ten thousand dollars. After their initial grants, they discontinued the experiment. Anger was fortunate enough to be among the recipients. With his money he made some slight revisions of *Scorpio Rising*, created the Sacred Mushroom version of *Inauguration*, and began *Kustom Kar Kommandos*. The film was never completed. In 1965 he showed an episode, similar to some of the opening scenes of *Scorpio*, in which a young man polishes his finished car with a giant powder puff.

The pastel colors and the fluid movement (the car seems to be turning on a giant turntable) are even richer than similar effects in his previous film. Like *Scorpio*, too, this episode had as its soundtrack a single rock and roll song, "Dream Lover." At the end of the sequence as he showed it, Anger appended an appeal for funds to finish the film. Those funds never appeared and *Kustom Kar Kommandos* was abandoned. Anger has left its one episode, resuscitating the form of the fragment as he had done when he distributed *Puce Moment* from *Puce Women*.

Fortunately a prospectus survives for the complete *KKK*. It is reproduced here in its entirety. It is interesting to note that the "Dream Lover" segment is not to be found within it:

> "KUSTOM"
> (KUSTOM KAR KOMMANDOS—FILM PROJECT)
>
> Film project by Kenneth Anger utilizing the Eastman rapid color emulsion Ektachrome ER, whose ASA rating of 125 opens up hitherto inaccessible realms of investigation in low-key color location work for the independent creative film-maker. Running time 30 minutes, track composed of pop music fragments combined with sync location-recorded sound effects and dialog.
>
> KUSTOM is an oneiric vision of a contemporary American (and specifically Californian) teenage phenomenon, the world of the hot-rod and customized car. I emphasize the word *oneiric*, as KUSTOM will *not* be a "documentary" covering the mechanical hopping-up and esthetic customizing of cars, but rather a dream-like probe into the psyche of the teenager for whom the *unique* aspect of the power-potentialized customized car represents a poetic extension of personality, an accessible means of wish-fulfillment. I will treat the custom cars created by the teenager and his adult mentors (such customizers as Ed Roth, Bill Cushenberry and George Barris, whose Kustom City in North Hollywood is a mecca of this world) as the objects of art—folk art if you prefer—that I consider them to be.
>
> The aforementioned adult "mentors," most of whom are located in the periphery of Los Angeles and hence readily accessible for filming, will be shown at work in their body shops on various cars-in-the-process-of-becoming, in the role of "arch-priests" to the teenagers whose commission they are fulfilling. (The locales of body shops and garages will be presented uniquely in gleaming highlighted low-key, in a manner already essayed for the motorcycle garage locations of SCORPIO RISING); the idolized customizers (the only adults seen in the film) will be represented as shadowy, mysterious personages (priests or witch-doctors) while the objects of their creation, the cars, will bathe in a pool

of multi-sourced (strictly non-realistic) light, an eye-magnet of nacreous color and gleaming curvilinear surfaces.

The treatment of the teenager in relation to his hot-rod or custom car (whether patiently and ingeniously fashioned by himself, as is usually the case, or commissioned according to his fantasy, for the economically favored) will bring out what I see as a definite *eroticization* of the automobile, in its dual aspect of narcissistic identification as virile power symbol and its more elusive role: seductive, attention-grabbing, gaudy or glittering mechanical mistress paraded for the benefit of his peers. (I am irresistably drawn to the comparison of these machines with an American cult-object of an earlier era, Mae West in her "Diamond Lil" impersonations of the Thirties.)

The formal filmic construct of KUSTOM is planned as follows: (The division into titled "sections" is uniquely for working convenience; these divisions will be "erased" in the finished work.) The dominant pop record is indicated in capitals.

1. HAVE MONEY (The Young Conformers.) An introduction insinuating the spectator into the teen-dream. A fast-shifting visual reverie utilizing the linking device of the lap-dissolve and the wipe to establish patterns of convention followed by the teenage (and sub-teen) group: similarity of hair-styling, style of dress, of language, attitude or manner, taste in dance patterns and pop music; the omniscience of certain popular heroes or ever-shifting masks on Archetypal Images.

2. DAWN (Crystalization.) The concept of individual "style" dawns upon the Teenager. The carefully composed aerodynamics of a crested coiffure as it is formed. The love-lock. Racked sideburns. The embroidered, self-identifying jacket or painted T-shirt. The "far-out" color combinations in stove-pipe pants, shock-effect shirts and socks. The Grail: the vision of the Teenager as Owner of his own, screamingly individualistic, unique and personalized custom car. (These images of the Grail, "the goal," will be floated across the mirrored image of the Teenager as he arranges his coiffure or clothes.) Subliminal flashes as [he] thumbs through hot-rod magazines or plays juke-box. Closeups of high-school desk tops showing open text books (Science or History) while adolescent hands doodle, first crudely, then with increasing refinement, silhouettes of hot-rod and custom "dream" cars.

3. THE NITTY-GRITTY (Realization.) The Teenager attacks. Dream into action. Abrupt change in formal construct: sharp cuts, swift pans, darting dollies. The night-lit junk-yard, weird

derelict cemetery: lifting a "goodie." The first jalopie: a rusty junked car pushed into the dark initiatory cave of the garage. Series of car-frames in the process of being stripped: an almost savage dismantling (analogy to wild animals dismembering a carcass).

4. MY GUY (The Rite.) Under the occult guidance of the shadowy, mysterious adult customizers performing as Arch-Priest, the Teenager's Dream Car is born (allusion to obstetrics). The alchemical elements come into play: phosphorescent blue tongue of the welding flame, cherry glow of joins, spark shower of the buffer. Major operation: dropping the front, raising the back of the car, "channeling" and "chopping." The Priest-Surgeon (customizer) perfects the metal modulations from cardboard mock-ups; plunges in with blowtorch and mallet. The swooping sculpted forms (blackened and rough) materialize in closeups and their intent is perceived.

5. IN HIS KISS (The Adorning.) Sudden darting color: the rainbow array as cans are opened, stirred dripping gaudy sticks held up for the Teenager's contemplation and approval. The iridescent "candy-flake" colors and shock-jewel tones in vogue. The Teenager chooses *his* color: tension, decision, joyful release. The cult-object—the shaping-up car body—in the swirl of colored spray-gun mists: rose and turquoise fluorescent fogs as coat upon carefully-stroked, glittering coat, the car-body emerges as a radiant, gem-hued object of adoration. A reflected color-bath splashes over the absorbed faces of the watching teenagers: a whoop of triumph, a jungle-stomp of joy as the custom car is "born."

6. WONDERFUL ONE (Possession.) The Teenager takes possession of his own completed custom or hot-rod car: the painted finish is caressed, the line admired (as would be the line of a girl friend) the chromed shift fondled, firmly grasped. (For this kaleidoscopic montage involving scores of custom and hot-rod cars, it is hoped to include the outstanding examples of customizing currently touring America in the Ford Custom Car Caravan, which could well represent the ideal Dream Cars of America's custom-conscious teenagers. However, for their appearance in KUSTOM, it will be necessary to film them *in movement* against unified black or nocturnal backgrounds—an effect that can be accomplished by camera or optical artifice if it proves impractical to night-drive these valuable machines.)

7. THE FUGITIVE (Flight and Freedom.) The Teenage hot-rodders "rev up" (The Syndrome of the Shift) and take off for a nocturnal drag race (irreal colored light-sources throughout). A

lone hot-rodder races down a curving mountain road (Dead Man's Curve). The Custom Boys, *in slow motion*, take command of the controls of their Dream Cars. (This concluding sequence of KUSTOM operates exclusively in the realm of "dream logic": it is intended to create a Science-Fictional atmosphere.) The hot-rodders experience the erotic power-ecstasy of the Shift (the Hurst shift will be employed) to the magnified accompaniment of motor and exhaust. The Custom Boys resemble Astronauts at their controls: their vari-hued craft seem to lift into space. (If possible, a prototype of an actual "air-car" by a noted West Coast designer will be utilized in this section.) The Dragsters streak down the search-light stabbed runway (ideally seen by helicopter) as in cross-cutting the Custom Boys are liberated into weightlessness with their strange craft, and plunge starward.

8. SHANGRI-LA (Apotheosis.) The Dragsters streak towards an imposing podium (by montage inference) piled high with towering, animated trophies of glittering gold; the Custom Boys range above the golden mountain high and free. A nocturnal jostling cheering crowd of teenagers (lit by swinging stabbing searchlights) swing up on their shoulders The Winner—Mr. Hot-Rod, his glowing triumph-filled countenance streaming sweat, his bare arms bearing his Golden Trophy Tower—he exults as The Conqueror, drinks in the adulation of the adolescent sea around him; he is startled by the sky-borne vroom of the upward-sweeping Dream Cars, his beaming face swiftly mirroring, in the moment of his triumph, a greater wonder, a greater goal.
END

Anticipation of KKK gradually faded in the late sixties as Anger made statements about his new project, *Lucifer Rising*, which was to be his "first religious-film." Before the theft of his footage in 1967, Anger had faced two major crises while he was trying to make the film in California. His first "Lucifer," a five-year-old boy, killed himself trying to fly off a roof; his second, Bobby Beausoleil, was convicted of murder. In addition to this, there was the perpetual financial struggle.

In several interviews he contrasted the project for *Lucifer Rising* with *Scorpio Rising* as films about the life force and the death force respectively. "It's about the angel-demon of light and beauty named Lucifer. And it's about the solar deity. The Christian ethos has turned Lucifer into Satan. But I show it in the gnostic and pagan sense. . . . Lucifer is the Rebel Angel behind what's happening in the world today. His message is that the Key of Joy is disobedience." Anger has also described his encounter with a demon, Joe, who got him to sign a contract in blood and disappeared after providing him with information that would help him to make the film.

According to the early reports, *Lucifer Rising* was to be about the "Love Generation" in California, hippies, and the magical aspects of the child's universe.

The first sign of the rejuvenation of his film-making in the 1970s was his completion of *Invocation of My Demon Brother*, which includes material from the original *Lucifer Rising*. Then he released *Puce Moment*, synchronized to a new song, and finally he finished *La Lune des Lapins*, having re-edited the material after twenty years, added a set of songs, and translated the title to *Rabbit's Moon*.

Invocation of My Demon Brother also marks a stylistic change and a refinement of Anger's Romanticism. Stylistically he shifts from the closed form of his earlier films to a more open form. The terms "closed" and "open form" denote degrees, not absolutes. The early films of Anger observe for the most part the classical unities of time and space and tend to have clearly defined beginnings, middles, and ends. Allowing for its dream transitions, *Fireworks* has a simple narrative continuity. The images of *Eaux D'Artifice* also follow a simple temporal progression and never move from one locale. The original version of *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* also has a strict temporal and spatial cohesion. The introduction of superimposition and above all the addition of hermetic insignia opened that form somewhat, but even then those foreign elements always had a more direct, literal relation to the central action. Even in *Scorpio Rising* the various elements of collage specifically comment upon the episodes Anger photographed, and they are edited to suggest the illusion of spatial and temporal continuity (Christ looking at the mustard torture, Puck cheering the racers on to death). In *Invocation of My Demon Brother* Anger still utilizes the offscreen look as a formal fixture; one can also distinguish an introduction and a conclusion. But nevertheless the film marks a radical step for him in the direction of open form, where montage does not depend on the illusion or the suggestion of spatial and temporal relationship between shots. The editing of images in Bruce Conner's *Cosmic Ray* exemplifies an open form. We see a naked woman dancing, an Indian chief from a Western, an African beating a drum, the Iwo Jima flag raising, many shots of armies, guns firing, explosions, a Mickey Mouse cartoon, and an academy leader. The transition between shots follows a pattern of rhythm and shock.

The intellectual coordinates involved in this change are more subtle. I have already referred to the Romantic tradition which informs all of Anger's films and which is especially clear in *Inauguration* and *Scorpio Rising*. In the subsequent chapters of this book I shall explore the variations of the Romantic heritage in relation to the works of other major American film-makers. These variations are almost as complex and discontinuous as the Romantic movement itself in Europe and America since the beginning of the nineteenth century. But the term remains useful. With admirable condensation, René Wellek defined the English and German tradition of Romanticism as "the glorification of creative imagination, a rhetoric of

metamorphoses and universal analogy."[16] In *Invocation of My Demon Brother*, Anger continues to glorify the creative imagination as he does in all of his films, but he extends the rhetoric of metamorphoses and universal analogy beyond the transformations of *Inauguration* and the dialectical metaphors of *Scorpio Rising* into a "web of correspondences, a rhetoric of metamorphoses in which everything reflects everything else," to quote Wellek again on the movement within Romanticism called Symbolism.

In *Invocation* Anger combines material form the original *Lucifer Rising*, a document of the Equinox of the Gods ritual he performed the night the film was stolen, a helicopter landing in Vietnam, footage of the Rolling Stones, alchemical tattoos.

As with his other films, our description will follow the outline of his program note:

> INVOCATION OF MY DEMON BROTHER (1969)
>
> Directed, Photographed, and Edited by Kenneth Anger. Filmed in San Francisco. Track composed by Mick Jagger on the Moog Synthesizer. *Cast:* Speed Hacker (Wand Bearer); Lenore Kandel and William (Deaconess and Deacon); Kenneth Anger (The Magus); Van Leuven (Acolyte); Harvey Bialy and Timotha (Brother and Sister of the Rainbow); Anton Szandor La Vey (His Satanic Majesty); Bobby Beausoleil (Lucifer). *Synopsis:* Invocation of My Demon Brother (Arrangement in Black and Gold). The shadowing forth of Our Lord Lucifer, as the Powers of Darkness gather at a midnight mass. The dance of the Magus widdershins around the Swirling Spiral Force, the solar swastika, until the Bringer of Light—Lucifer—breaks through. "The true Magick of Horus requires the passionate union of opposites."—Aleister Crowley.[17]

Anger's subtitle of the film ("Arrangement in Black and Gold") ironically recalls the titles Whistler gave to his paintings, such as "Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket," or the famous portrait of his mother, "Arrangement in Gray and Black." Of course, the blackness is also metaphorical: the spiritual matrix from which Lucifer, whose wings are golden in this film, emerges.

The titles of the film are printed in golden letters over a painting of a black Lucifer with a Cyclopean eye and flaming stars surrounding his head. The first shot of the film is a parody of the painting. A white-haired man, whose head is flanked by stars from a flag, opens his eyes. (Again Anger begins a film with an image of waking.) He sees a naked torso. When he turns to the right, then the left, he sees two different shots of the same two naked boys on a sofa. Before he lifts and lowers a long transparent wand, we see images of an occult tattoo.

The tattoo, like the costume in *Inauguration*, is central to the structure of *Invocation*. The film moves among levels of reality, suggesting that one

image is the signature of another. It is Anger's most metaphysical film; here he eschews literal connections, makes the images jar against one another, and does not create a center of gravity through which the collage is to be interpreted, as the images of Christ could be interpreted through the actions of the motorcyclists in *Scorpio*, or as the images of Crowley could be interpreted through the ritual of *Inauguration*. Thus deprived of a center of gravity, every image has equal weight in the film; and more than ever before in an Anger film, the burden of synthesis falls upon the viewer.

When the Wand Bearer looks up, we see the first of two shots of a helicopter letting out American Marines. The image is tinted red. Anger told Tony Rayns that he printed this image on a C roll over the entire film, but so faintly that it emerged to the naked eye only twice. He suggested that with infra-red glasses it might be seen throughout.

Gradually the center of attention shifts from the Wand Bearer to a hashish party in which the Deacon and Deaconess are smoking with a friend. Suddenly, at the end of the hashish episode, as if the smoke had dramatically worked its power, the Magus, Anger himself in the costume of an Egyptian god, appears before a fountain of fire (out of *Dante's Inferno* again, recalling the spectacular appearance of Kali in *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome*). Then we see him rushing around a stage, waving a wand, pouring potions, and performing his Autumn Equinox ritual, often in superimposition and always with an accelerated speed. The filmmaker Ben Van Meter filmed this section for Anger the night of his rite at the Straight Theater. In the early stages of the ritual center of the film, Anger interjects shots of himself reading Crowley's novel of witchcraft, *Moonchild*, and then of arachnid—or spider-like—tattoos.

The more we see of the ritual, the more often it is interrupted by other shots. There is an eye behind a fishbowl; then the first of many superimpositions suggestive of playing cards appears—an image is superimposed over itself with a reversal of top and bottom, so that the picture resembles the face-cards in the deck. The first of these images shows a young man, naked above the waist and with many moving arms like the traditional Kali of Indian iconography. The progress of the ritual seems to engender a greater degree of abstraction and anamorphosis in the film.

During the bombardment of superimposed and abstracted images, we catch a first glimpse of a horned and bearded devil who at the end of the rite will fuse with the Magus in a rapid montage of similar body and facial gestures. This is his Demon Brother. Yet before this culmination of the ceremony, a door with a Tarot skeleton on it opens and His Satanic Majesty enters and ceremoniously places a skull on the floor. The Magus burns a document, then a cat.

As the cat is burned, a shot of a group of Hell's Angels standing around in their leather gear fades in over the image of the flames. This combination of images is particularly evocative of the interpenetration of levels of reality mentioned earlier. The opposition of filmic textures rein-

forces this impression as the thin, somewhat murky, superimposed images of the rite seem about to melt into a rich, sunlit view of the Hell's Angels in their black leather and silver studs. But the image is only momentary. The Magus becomes his Demon Brother. Then he carries a Nazi swastika around the stage as the film cuts to another bare-chested boy with a swastika pattern projected over him. The scene shifts again, in texture as well as image, to a group of ecstatic dancers in the audience of a rock festival. The force is precisely that of the Hell's Angels shot, of suddenly wrenching the film out of the realm of rite and occult signs into a more familiar realm. In a complementary but converse way, we simultaneously see the Hell's Angels and the rock festival as aspects of an occult system.

Later, with less flourish than the entrance of the Magus, Lucifer appears for an instant as a handsome young man in black top hat with golden wings. Immediately afterwards, the Deacon and Deaconess and the members of the jazz band begin to descend a staircase, perhaps a dozen figures in all. Lucifer pops up again, this time under the superimposition of a playing card with a top hat on it. Mick Jagger, his earthly manifestation, appears on stage at a festival.

The film comes quickly to an end as a series of shots interrupts the repeated image of a bare-chested youth with a moiré pattern projected over him. We see the Magus on the stage for the last time, then a final shot of Jagger performing. Finally, a tiny mummy (more in the South American than the Egyptian style) rushes down the empty staircase in a cloud of smoke with the sign "Zap You're Pregnant. That's Witchcraft."

Shortly after *Invocation of My Demon Brother* was completed, I met Anger on a boat going from England to Holland. He had just emigrated from America. In our brief conversation he doubted if he would ever distribute his films again. He was dissatisfied with the basic materials of cinema. After having made a film with vertical, rather than the traditional horizontal elongation in Egypt, he had destroyed it by projecting it with the projector turned on its side. The leaking of oil caused a fire which burned the film. He said he would much rather "project the images directly into people's heads." It is very much a part of the aspiration of *Invocation of My Demon Brother* to get beyond the limitations of cinema and directly into the head. In the curious message of the mummy, we have an attempt to do magic directly through cinema. Rayns opens his excellent study of Anger with a statement by Anger of his attitude toward film:

> I have always considered movies evil; the day that cinema was invented was a black day for mankind. Centuries before photography there were talismans, which actually anticipated photographs, since the dyes they used on the cheap vellum produced patterns when they faded in light. A talisman was a sticky fly-paper trying to trap a spirit—cunningly you printed on it a "photograph" of the demon you wanted to capture in it. Photography is a blatant attempt to steal the soul. The astral body

> is always just latent in a person, and certain cunning and gifted photographers can take an image of the astral body. The whole thing is having an image of someone to *control* them. If you're out of your mind with love it becomes understandable. *Any* crime is justifiable in the name of Love. In fact, it shouldn't have to be a "crime": *Anything* is justifiable in the name of Love.
>
> My films are primarily concerned with sexuality in people. My reason for filming has nothing to do with "cinema" at all; it's a transparent excuse for capturing people, the equivalent of saying "Come up and see my etchings." . . . It's wearing a little thin now. . . . So I consider myself as working Evil in an evil medium.[18]

In Anger's films his image of himself, of the self, is as a Magus, never as a film-maker. He continues the tradition of Jean Cocteau, a film-maker dear to him, who in *Le Sang d'un Poète* first made the aesthetic quest legitimate as a subject for cinema. Interestingly, Cocteau used film to examine the workings of poetry, refraining from the absolute reflexivity of a film about cinema. Anger and other American avant-garde film-makers took from Cocteau both his fascination with the traditional means of art—poetry, music, sculpture—as opposed to cinema itself and his fusion of the aesthetic and the erotic quests. We have already seen how Sidney Peterson in both *The Cage* and *Mr. Frenhofer and the Minotaur* continued in that track. Deren too, though less directly, defined the self in terms of the fusion of erotic and aesthetic; and we shall shortly see the same is true of Markopoulos, who unlike them has posited the film-maker as his central artist.

For Anger the aesthetic endeavor is a category of magick. His image of the self is particularly complex because it involves as many distinctions as there are grades for the magician. Like *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome*, the vision of the self in *Invocation* has its foundation in the Romantic idea of the unitary man whose one character is made up of different individuals in opposition. But the magician of *Invocation* is of a higher order than Shiva of *Inauguration*, and the range of the film is both wider and more diffuse. The central act of the film is described in its title, but the cinematic context in which this manifestation occurs is a meditation on Anger's art and its place in the world. The first part of *Lucifer Rising* was to be called, for reasons not entirely clear to me, "The Magic House of Oz." The document which the Magus ritually burns is a text by Crowley, of which the first word, "oz," is all that can be seen on the screen. The reference must also extend to the books of L. Frank Baum, which Anger has said he admires. The scenes of smoking hashish and the descent of the staircase probably take place in "the magic house of Oz."

Invocation of My Demon Brother is an investigation of the aesthetic quest through occult rhetoric. What makes this film more difficult than any previous Anger film is the film-maker's new use of his art as an instrument of discovery. The film is about the concentration of the imagi-

nation and indirectly about the power of art to achieve it. The montage compares the trance of music—the jazz band, Jagger and his audience at a rock festival—and the trance of drugs—smoking hashish—with possession by war—the helicopter scenes—suicide—the Saturnian torso—and with sexuality—the wrestling naked boys—as the dynamics of imaginary initiation. The eventual glimpses of Lucifer are the first tastes of its achievement.

By describing the cinematography of *Invocation* as an instrument of discovery one assigns to Anger the modernist principle of presenting the process of making as the central fact of the artifact. Watching this film, one feels that the film-maker did not know what the film was to be until it was finished. Obviously, the element of discovery exists in all film-making and in the making of all art. Yet there is a point for the artist when revelation becomes the most important aspect of his work. Anger reached that point with *Invocation of My Demon Brother*.

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From Trance to Myth

IN LOS ANGELES IN 1947, while Kenneth Anger was editing *Fireworks*, Gregory Markopoulos began to shoot *Psyche*, the first film of his trilogy, *Du Sang de la Volupté et de la Mort*. He was at the time a film student at the University of Southern California, and he had made films before. A short and rather charming version of Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, which he made when he was twelve, was exhibited briefly in the mid-1960s, and an autobiographical outline from 1954 says, "Upon entering Woodward High School I began making some very bad 8mm films. . . . During my second semester at USC I made a short film in experimental form based on Hudson's very handsome tale, *Green Mansions*." Markopoulos's filmography nevertheless begins with *Psyche*, his first 16mm film and the first film he put into distribution

A few months before he began shooting *Psyche*, he had assisted Curtis Harrington in making his first film, *Fragment of Seeking*, where a young man pursues an elusive blonde woman through a maze of corridors reminiscent of Maya Deren's pursuit

of the mirror-faced figure in *Meshes of the Afternoon*, to discover in the end that she is a skeleton with a wig. In this pure example of the trance film, Harrington wanted to play the young man himself. He enlisted Markopoulos to help him. Markopoulos has always scrupulously declined any credit for the film: "I photographed the film, exactly following his directions. Everything was done by him: all I did was to push the camera starter. Curtis took all the exposures." Three years later, when Markopoulos was to make his own version of the psycho-dramatic trance film, *Swain*, he would enlist the aid of his friend Robert Freeman to do precisely the same for him.

Psyche has no parallel among early American avant-garde films. For Markopoulos was at once the film-maker most attracted to narrative of his generation (he has adapted several literary works to film) and one of the most radical narrative film-makers in the world. He took such extreme liberties with Pierre Louys's unfinished novella, *Psyche*, that one would hardly recognize it as the source of his film. Nevertheless, he took just enough to give his film a cohesion and a tension that make it a continually fascinating work.

In *Psyche*, as in his later, narrative-based films, Markopoulos dispenses with speech without giving up the intricacy normally found only in the talking film; although he absolutely relies upon visual means—his soundtracks, even in the rare cases where words are involved, never explain the visual dimension—he does not simplify. Three interrelated characteristics define Markopoulos's style: color, rhythm, and atemporal construction. Color, rather than story, has been the emotional vehicle of his films. Although his control of rhythm and of atemporal construction gradually evolved from *Psyche* in 1947 to *Gammelion* in 1968, his handling of color was sure and consistent from the beginning. As Markopoulos made more films, the complexity and scope of his rhythmic invention increased. In his later films, his shots are either much shorter or much longer than in his early works; his rhythm becomes progressively more independent of the subject. What I have called his atemporal construction can be more amply described as a dialectic of time, where the shots of a film sometimes fall into a temporal order and sometimes cluster together in a plastic unity divorced from sequence and causality. As Markopoulos's art developed, the distinction between imagination and actuality dissolved completely and several "shimmering threads" of continuity began to appear simultaneously, sometimes interweaving into a fine net. Nevertheless, the extent to which *Psyche* forecasts one whole line of Markopoulos's evolution, as the second film of his trilogy, *Lysis*, does another, is extraordinary.

Psyche opens with a statue of Mercury pointing upward and toward a field as if beckoning the spectator into the film. A door opens on a figure shrouded in black, whom the film-maker has called both "a specter" and "the unknown" in his paraphrases of the film. There are blossoms scattered on the floor, and a hand offers flowers to the figure. This specter will reappear at crucial moments in the film. In a lecture delivered in Ath-

ens in 1955, the film-maker publicly rejoiced in the ambiguities of his film: "A hand offers flowers. The film spectator may assume what he will. The shrouded figure may be Psyche."[1]

The sudden intrusion of a hand-held shot looking down at walking legs introduces the meeting of the male and female protagonists. They pass each other in the street; they then turn around and begin to talk and laugh familiarly. "Why should the words be supplied?" the film-maker asks. "The film spectator, thrust into the film by the film creator, supplies the thoughts and feelings which make up the dialogue."

Markopoulos frames his shots just behind the head, or over the shoulder of the listener, so that with the intercutting of faces in this unheard conversation, he maintains a view of both speaker and hearer and a sense of their relative distances from the camera. Throughout *Psyche* the framing and moving of the camera are dynamic and interesting. Markopoulos paid particular attention to compositions-in-depth, with details both in the foreground and background of his image. His awareness of the composition of the individual frame was the most acute of the avant-gardists of his generation, save perhaps for Broughton's in *Mother's Day*. Markopoulos's lifelong devotion to Josef von Sternberg, who taught at USC while Markopoulos was studying there, centers perhaps upon that director's attention to the frame. Yet the photography of *Psyche*, especially in its play of depth and movement, seems to owe more to Welles's *Citizen Kane* than to anything in von Sternberg.

Together the couple climb an outdoor staircase to a terrace from which he points out a house and in particular a window with its blinds half-closed. As she stares up at the window the wind blows her hair. In his lecture, Markopoulos speculates about this moment: "It is, perhaps, Eros being born again from the West Wind? Who knows? Let us not forget, though, that the West Wind is of a jealous nature." Then, just as suddenly as the man's legs appeared, Psyche is seen standing on a beach dressed in a long white gown; then, kneeling near the camera, she moulds a mound of sand, seaweed, and rocks, until a shadow falls across it and her. She looks terrified as a male hand touches and twists her hair as the wind had a few moments earlier in the film. Into the montage of this caressing and terror the film-maker weaves his first atemporal construction, mixing flashbacks in a stream of consciousness that suggests the whole beach episode was a dream, a fantasy, or perhaps an archetypal memory triggered by the movement of wind through her hair.

Immediately after the shot of his hand touching her hair comes an image of his face, not on the beach but on the terrace before the window. Their exchange of looks, hers from the beach and his from the terrace, initiates a brief recapitulation in which two strains—one of their meeting, climbing the stairs, and pointing to the window, the other of Psyche's run, building the mound, and the sea itself—are both scrambled out of sequence and intermeshed in checkerboard fashion. For a moment this abstract cascade of images halts with both figures again on the terrace. Then

the first reappearance of the specter serves as a buffer shot in a transition to a new scene.

This montage of abstraction and recapitulation is an essential of the Markopoulos style. In *Psyche* there is another, longer, such sequence at the end of the film. Similar constructions are crucial to the structures of the later films *Swain, Serenity*, and *Twice a Man*. In the films made after that, particularly *Himself as Herself, The Illiac Passion*, and *Gammelion*, temporal order becomes so ambivalent that recapitulation ceases to be meaningful in the world Markopoulos evokes. Yet even in the late works brief clusters of images are used to execute the secondary function they have here; making a graceful and abstract transition of scenes.

At the end of the section just described, after the shot of the specter, we find ourselves in Psyche's bedroom. A slow dolly toward her sleeping on her couch is interrupted twice by images of the hero in a costume suggesting his transformation into Eros. In this dream he embraces her. When he caresses her black gloves, she laughs in her sleep and awakens.

She examines a marble bust, which Markopoulos tells us is of "Psyche herself," touches her face, then kisses the statue. She spins around gaily, the twirl of her dress intercut six times with a hummingbird buzzing at a flower. Her happiness seems to extend through the beginning of the next scene in which we find her at the end of her twirl. She and the man are walking hand in hand through an exotic garden, smiling, and giving each other flowers to smell. When they come to a hilltop, she walks forward to the camera, while he remains behind, framed over her shoulder in the background. Her gaiety is gone. A shot at the level of their knees shows him approach her from the distance. The wind has caught her hair. When he touches her shoulder and gently sniffs at her hair, she turns to him in fear and recoils back out of his reach, falling out of frame. The music of the soundtrack stops. We are plunged into a blue-tinted superimposition of waves, seagulls, the rays of the sun, palm leaves, and two indistinct figures on a beach. Markopoulos described this elusive episode in his article, "Psyche's Search for the Herb of Invulnerability": "The erotic nightmare continues. A hand is placed on Psyche's shoulder. She shudders, for she is in that other country and it is cold. The fingers of Eros are like frost. Unsuspectedly the film spectator and the silver screen, bathed in blue, become submerged with Psyche upon the borderline of her fears."

From a pure blue the color switches to orange. It is sunset as she regains consciousness. As she breaks away from the man, the specter approaches the camera and the image is flooded with an orange sunburst. The startling transition to blue and its resolution in orange are examples of the emotional use of color in this, as well as in all of Markopoulos's films. The orchestration of color is by no means limited to solid screen dominants; it operates in his choice of setting and clothing for his characters as well. For example, in the scene immediately following the appearance of the specter, Psyche descends the steps of a church wearing black; she is obviously very upset. She momentarily and vainly seeks

comfort and steadiness by caressing the base of a black metal lamp-post. She reads a letter, crumples it, and thrusts it into the camera lens. The sudden change of scene, the omission of what led her to the church or of what happened in it, and the withholding of the text of the letter, make this the most enigmatic and elliptical episode in the film. But the choice of color and the heroine's reaction to the letter provide enough information for us to assimilate the scene into the highly ambiguous context of the film as it has been evolving.

The reader of Louys's novel will have an advantage over the untutored spectator of the film at this point, although that advantage might just as easily be called a hindrance within the logic of the film experience. In the novelette, Psyche asks her priest's advice about whether or not she should accept her lover's invitation to visit his estate. He tells her not to go, but she goes nonetheless. It would be futile here to embark upon a discussion of the relative merits of psychological clarity (the novella) and poetic ambiguity (the film). The essence of Markopoulos's skill as an abstract, narrative film-maker resides in his ability to present events in a richly ambiguous context without sacrificing the illusion that there is a fictive scheme, however elusive, holding them together. This discretion is the aesthetic justification for his cavalier treatment of literary works.

Returning to the film itself, at the end of a transitional passage, we see Psyche in red in a Japanese garden, before a red bridge. She seems very happy. As she strikes a large gong, there is a brief montage of a path, the gong, an eye, an ear, and the closing of a door. A passage of darkness ends with a moving shot of a row of candles being snuffed out by an unknown hand. The camera moves in on Psyche naked on a bed. The bare legs of a man come forward. As they embrace we see clouds shift from blue, green, yellow, to red. An image of water dripping into a pool suggests the climax of the lovemaking. A stone shoulder and a stone foot are intercut with the final images of their embrace. A clock appears. Then the man, dressed in a suit, appears smoking in the Japanese garden. A dark-skinned woman walks through the garden, smiling at him. He smiles back at the woman; then he tosses his cigar into the pool (the camera set-up is the same as at the end of their lovemaking) and follows her. The specter appears again. Psyche, lonely in a white dress, presses her face to the large window of a hallway. At night, in the next shot, there is a man, perhaps the hero, sitting at supper.

In the final montage the specter nods its head; then, in quick succession, images appear of an old lady who glared at the couple when they first met, the laughing pair, their kiss at the train station, statues, Psyche naked in bed, the laughing pair. After a final image of the specter, the door closes, and the film ends.

Markopoulos made *Psyche* under conditions of incredible austerity. He borrowed a camera, used money that was sent for his school tuition to buy film, and when it came to editing, he put the film together with Scotch tape because he had no rewinding or splicing equipment. That he

had to shoot only 1200 feet of film for a work that runs 835 feet when edited is another testament to his economy.

In the years since the film was made he has offered many and even contradictory clues to the film's interpretation. The lecture of 1955 which I have quoted frequently here returns again and again to an Orphic interpretation of the film as a rite of initiation both for its heroine and for the film spectator. In reference to Psyche's dream he writes, "Day and Night no longer exist. Like Hercules, Psyche has begun her search for the *herb of invulnerability*. In order to discover this *herb of invulnerability*, she must journey to another country, she leaves behind her body, and now travels boldly into the unknown with the film spectator." About the meeting at the train station, he adds, "Psyche actually believes that through Eros she will be able to discover the *herb of invulnerability*." He implies her search was in vain. The climax of his lecture is deliberately obscure: "Swiftly, with the furious symbols of the stone foot, the stone shoulders, the film reveals the theme of *Psyche* and rushes like the *psyche* towards its completion. Events appear in retrospect, until once again the spectator realizes that he has returned to the original point of departure." The most evocative, and perhaps the most helpful idea of Markopoulos's article, appears in the second paragraph: "Color is Eros."[2]

An earlier document from 1952 again raises both useful and baffling points. Like the later lecture, he couches his analysis in ambiguous phrases:

> The specter throughout is what Pierre Louys meant by "the unknown," perhaps it is the young film creator, who did not know the film's final outcome, similar to Jung writing one of his books and spending years deciding exactly what he said. Or it may be the author Louys, who never finished the book *Psyche*. But I would like to think that it is all three of the above. Fourthly, it is the clue to my cutting technique and film construction.

In elaboration on the last point, Markopoulos also wrote that the veiled figure in *Psyche* functioned like a fade-out.

Other statements in this text are more puzzling, such as one that the film is "a study in stream-of-consciousness narration of a *Lesbian Soul*, who in abandoning her own *psyche* destroys herself." He asks us to notice how in the train station episode the color is drab before they kiss and with the meeting of their lips becomes bright.

Markopoulos's notes equate the film *Psyche* with the human psyche. The source of Markopoulos's distinctive montage, and hence of the structure of his films, is not a literary tradition of stream-of-consciousness writing, but the source shared with that tradition, his study of how the mind thinks. The ultimate aspiration of Markopoulos's form has been the mimesis of the human mind. In different degrees and different ways this might be the aim of the American avant-garde film-maker in general. In that case the realm of Markopoulos's distinction has been the investigation

of memory, personal and archetypal. His films lay bare a way of visionary thinking affirming the perpetual present tense, in which causality and linear time are secondary discontinuous modes of experience.

After completing *Psyche*, Markopoulos left Los Angeles for his home town, Toledo, Ohio, where he completed his trilogy. He called *Lysis* "a study in stream-of-consciousness poetry of a lost, wandering, homosexual soul. There is a symbolic birth in the opening scene; the wanderings; the reincarnations of one soul into a still greater soul, until in the final cycle the soul of immortality or of UNDERSTANDING is given to the wanderer; we see him going toward the far city."[3]

The film's title comes from a Platonic dialogue on the nature of friendship. Set to Honegger and Claudel's oratorio, *Dance of Death*, the film begins with a rapid succession of static images (Chinese figurines before a tapestry, a photograph of mother and child, a painting), which may be read as the thoughts of the artist as he stands by a river. After a second burst of mementos, in which the juxtaposition of childhood photographs with delicate toys and laces suggests a formative period under strong feminine influences, the rhythm of the film evens out to an almost metronomic pace. A series of tableaux from the body of the film: an ugly woman pops from one tree to another in jump-cuts; a young man lying in bed rubs his feet against streamers; the artist, played by the film-maker himself, wanders through a graveyard; a nude man, hanging by his wrists, is stabbed in the back; a black woman plays with a swan; a boy in a toga jumps, through stop photography, among the columns of a neo-classical building; another youth sleeps in a tree. At the end of this series the artist follows railroad tracks away from the camera.

Markopoulos's note for *Charmides* includes a virtually complete synopsis of that brief film:

> A concluding cinematic statement to the film trilogy. By no means, though, the final statement of the film author on the major theme employed in the trilogy. The locale is a midwestern college campus. A lone youth on the campus green is scrutinizing a tiny ceramic horse whose one leg is broken. Next a walk into the woods, but where? Nowhere. Two coffins, one right after the other, appear, a superimposed cemetery, a young child running to her grandmother by a grave. The trilogy is at an end. The spectator's mind keeps probing . . . what?[4]

The title again comes from Plato. In this particular dialogue, Socrates inquires who is the most beautiful boy in Athens and then gives his views on temperance. If the toga-clad youth and the allusion to the classical myth of Leda and the Swan gave *Lysis* a tenuous connection to its Platonic source, the relation between *Charmides* and the original dialogue is even more ephemeral. The three parts of the trilogy *Du Sang de la Volupté et de la Mort* show a diminishing intensity. The play of nearness and depth,

the orchestration of colors, and the complexity of montage which distinguished *Psyche* are gone in the two subsequent films, and the formal invention of *Lysis* and *Charmides* was not to mature in Markopoulos's work until the mid-sixties.

The film-maker edited his film in the process of shooting. The only splices occur at the joining of the one-hundred-foot rolls of film which fit into the camera he borrowed from Carter Wolff, in gratitude for which he dedicated the whole trilogy to him. The experimental eschewing of post-photography editing and the idea that a film could be shot and constructed at the same time show Markopoulos's commitment to cinema as an instrument of discovery.

Throughout his entire career, even when he prepared elaborate scenarios, he approached his materials with an extraordinary freedom from preconception, so that the first complete print returned from the laboratory would always be a revelation to him. Furthermore, no Markopoulos film has ended up looking like its original outline. Even when he undertook the commission of recording the play of his friend George Christopoulos, *The Death of Hemingway*, he completely restructured it in the editing (which he tends to do sequentially, from the beginning of the film to the end, without revisions) by incorporating in that color film a black-and-white ice floe, which happened to be left over at the editing table from Adolfas Mekas's *Hallelujah the Hills*.

It was in 1950, again in Toledo, that he made his version of the trance film, *Swain*. His collaborator Robert C. Freeman, Jr., chose the locations and mechanically operated the camera, as Markopoulos himself had once done for Curtis Harrington.

Swain is a film in three parts or movements with an elusive frame. It is part of what was to have been a much longer film called either *Rain Black, My Love*, or *Poème Onerique*, and it is a remarkably oblique distillation of Nathaniel Hawthorne's first novel, *Fanshawe*. The transformation is so drastic that no one could guess the source. In the first part of the film, the protagonist, played by the film-maker, rushes through the woods, climbs an embankment, discovers and then enters a mysterious house. In the middle section, a woman appears. Following the path of the hero, she pursues him through the house and subsequently disturbs his reverie in a greenhouse. As before, he flees from her. In the final part of the film, they meet briefly and awkwardly before a climactic recapitulation of images. The frame of the film appears piece-meal, first in the opening shots of the hero studying himself in a mirror. It is forecasted, though we cannot realize it at the time, in a series of architectural shots in the middle of the film, and again in a brief cut very late in the work, from the hero discovering a woman's stocking to a different view of him, dressed in pajamas, ripping up decorations or flowers. At the end of the film these elements are resolved: the hero in his pajamas opens his curtains, which disguise a windowless brick wall; the architectural details were those of an insane asylum, and we see his pursuer leaving it after paying him a

visit. Like *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, the whole of *Swain* is framed within the mind of the inmate of an institution, but unlike Weine's film, there is no great overhanging question. We can infer that the patient is institutionalized only because of his refusal to accept a sexuality he finds foreign and gross and which society insists upon as the norm.

In an essay which Markopoulos has called "perhaps the only perceptive article concerning my work," Donald Weinstein says, "*Swain* is an evocation in gentle images and visual symbols of a subconscious rejection of the stereotyped masculine role that society and women insist upon. This rejection takes the form of escape: flight in fantasy from what is visually conceived as crude, repelling sexuality into the purity of creative activity, of nature, and of individual personality left inviolate."[5]

Swain is rich in metaphors. In the run of the hero through the woods and up a hill, quick interjections, first of a worm crawling on the wing of a dead bird, then of an alligator trying to mount another in a mud wallow, provide the first suggestion that his running might be a flight. The precise nature of that flight is further hinted at by his encounter with the marble head of a satyr on the road to the house. Inside the house, the woman finds the hero sleeping on a bed. As she leans over to kiss him, the montage shows a black bug crawling within an exquisite white flower, a metaphor which also forecasts the scene in the greenhouse. Later the image is reversed: the bug crawls back out of the center of the flower when the her-

Gregory J. Markopoulos in his film *Swain*. Copyright estate of G. J. Markopoulos, courtesy Temenos Archive.

oine continues her pursuit into his floral sanctuary. The last in this series of animal and statuary metaphors is the image of a ram gargoyle intercut repeatedly with the heroine during her meeting with the hero in the last part of the film.

As in *Psyche*, costume has an important function in *Swain*. The hero's elegant robe in the opening shots at the mirror and his pajamas at the end are the uniforms of his narcissistic imprisonment. The woman first appears in a white wedding dress, following the trail of the hero. When she encounters him in the house, he is asleep in a military uniform. At their final encounter, both are dressed in suits, suggestive in this context of the formality and the strain of their meeting.

At the end of the film, while the heroine and hero are talking before a small colonnade, a rapid recapitulation moves the film to its conclusion. Forty very quick shots, ranging from three to eight frames long and each, on the average, on the screen for a quarter of a second, recapitulate the whole film, mixing shots of the hero from various points in the film with buildings, statues, and the gargoyle. This spectacular summary of the film changes to images of the hero confined and of the heroine walking away from the institution.

In terms of its speed and scope of images, the clustered recapitulation of *Swain* is a great advance over that of *Psyche*, where the shots were for the most part a second and a half in length (the shortest being twenty-seven frames, or just over a second). The image cluster does not figure in the construction of the two short films Markopoulos completed in the early 1950s, *Flowers of Asphalt* (1951) and *Eldora* (1952). Between 1954 and 1961, he worked in Greece, Italy, and America on *Serenity*. The film had only a half-dozen screenings before it was stolen by its producer and disappeared. I did not see it and do not know the pace or form of the final montage, where the film is said to end "with a clip from every scene in the picture following each other in lightning sequence."[6] Thus the technique of *Swain* extends through *Serenity* to *Twice a Man*.

Swain, with the title *Rain Black, My Love*, ran for about an hour when Markopoulos left in 1950 for his first trip to Europe. When he returned, Brandon Films offered to distribute it if he would cut out half an hour. Markopoulos removed a long section in which the hero wandered within the house, which Amos Vogel of Cinema 16 once considered the most exciting scene in the film. Unfortunately, he destroyed what he removed.

Swain was not so much based on Hawthorne's *Fanshawe* as a project that originally began as an adaptation of *Fanshawe*. Hawthorne's novel describes the adventures of three college students—two men, Walcott and Fanshawe, and a woman, Ellen Langton. The first radical alteration of Hawthorne came when Markopoulos decided to combine the two males. In an interesting article on the film, "From *Fanshawe* to *Swain*," he admits it was the early description of Fanshawe that inspired him, not the plot:

"a ruler in a world of his own and independent of the beings that surrounded him."[7]

The complexity of *Psyche* derives, in part at least, from the artist's desire to condense the events of a novella into a short cinematic form and create a network of associations in portraying the affair of two active participants. *Swain*, on the other hand, is a trance film. Its hero is passive; its development is linear, with elaboration by metaphor rather than by the interaction of events. The trance film is by nature an erotic quest, and its quest figure is either a dreamer or in a mad or visionary state. In *Swain* the search through the imagination for a sexual identity takes a negative form; flight replaces quest, and the film resolves itself in narcissism and in a portrait of society's imprisonment of the self.

Twice a Man loosely follows the myth of Hippolytus. In Euripides' play, his stepmother, Phaedra, tries to seduce him. When he spurns her, she falsely accuses him to his father, by whose curse he is driven into the sea and drowned. In the opening of Frazer's monumental study, *The Golden Bough*, we find the subsequent legend that through the aid of the goddess Artemis and the physician Asclepius, he was resurrected and lived immortally in the sacred grove of Nemi. Frazer says he was called "Twice Born" there, and it is from this legend that Markopoulos adapts his title.

In the film, Paul, a contemporary Hippolytus, makes a visit to his mother's house after crossing New York Harbor to Staten Island. As he wanders through the house, mixing memory with prophecy, he envisions scenes of his life with his mother and with a male lover, whom the film-maker calls the Artist-Physician, a representation of the creative self.

The montage of the film interweaves the thoughts and memories of four people—Paul, his lover, and two versions of his mother, one as a young woman, the other very old. The point of reference shifts from one *persona* to another in an interlocking set of framing structures. The specificity of the reference point looms at one time and fades away at others. Paul exists both before and after his death; once, when entering the house, he sees glimpses of the young men come to mourn his death.

The film opens with an imageless screen. For a long time, it is totally black and only the sound of rain is heard. The first shot we see is of the Artist-Physician sitting sadly on the deck of the slowly moving ferry. One could view the film as if it had evolved entirely through his mind. The opening shot is interrupted six times by split-second flashes of the New York skyline. The interruptions grow longer and more frequent until the skyline is the dominant shot, and a single very short echo of the first shot punctuates it. This form of cinematic enjambment distinguishes the change of shots throughout most of *Twice a Man*. It offers the film-maker nearly infinite variations for telegraphing his next image and for sustaining the overtones of the previous one. To the eye quickly trained by a few minutes of watching *Twice a Man*, a direct cut, without forecast or recall, is a visual shock.

A second shot of the Artist-Physician on the ferry prepares us, through its interruptions, for the introduction of the hero, Paul. In the first elaborated sequence of the film, Paul seems to contemplate suicide. He stands at the very edge of a roof looking down. His isolation is emphasized by a rhythmic intercutting of his ascent to the roof by climbing a ladder, as seen through a slowly following zoom lens mixed with shots of the movements of dancers at the party he has just left, shot from above. The Artist-Physician, his lover, appears on the roof, framed in the distance behind Paul. He places his hand on Paul's shoulder in a shimmering montage of intercut close-ups of hand, shoulder, and lips. In his article on the production and the structure of the film, "The Driving Rhythm," Markopoulos refers to this episode as the earliest meeting of Paul and his lover.

Paul, too, leaves Manhattan and embarks on the ferry. His trip moves through day and night simultaneously, combining sunset, moonlight, and dawn, and includes such shadowy images of other passengers that it distinctly suggests Hades and the crossing of the Styx. Within the course of the crossing several brief episodes occur, for the reference has shifted now from the mind of the lover to that of Paul.

After the ferry lands, Markopoulos gives us another scene of rhythmic and intellectual counterpoint before Paul goes to his mother's house. In the episode in question, he cuts between Paul sitting among giant marble slabs of a public monument and his lover pacing on the marble terrace of a museum as the sun fades and shines again in synchronization with his movements. The montage contrasts the calm waiting of one and the anxiety of the other, but still more interesting is the atemporal juxtaposition of the two scenes.

The house of Paul's mother is the climax in a line of mysterious or enchanted houses in Markopoulos's work—the house which the couple in *Psyche* point at and observe, the house in *Swain*, whose exploration the film-maker unfortunately removed—and in other early American avant-garde films. The ultimate source and most fabulous example of this motif was the Hotel des Folies-Dramatiques in Jean Cocteau's *Le Sang d'un Poète*. As Paul wanders through the rooms, scenes with his mother as a young woman inside the house and scenes with his lover outside take shape. The mother as an aged woman remains throughout *Twice a Man* an indistinct figure. She incarnates the spirit of memory and of loss which pervades the film.

Alternately, the house is empty and inhabited. As Paul first enters he sees, almost as if they were mirages, two young men crying. They are his mourners. He calls out, and we see quick flashes of the young and the old mother and hear a human voice for the first time in the film. Although we might expect to hear the hero at this point, each time we hear a woman's voice calling *his* name.

In the early digressions from the action in the house, Markopoulos gives us three scenes of the Frazerian Hippolytus in inverted order. In one

we see him ritually cut a lock of his hair while kneeling on a city street and "offer" it in a mailbox. The second, through a breathtaking cut from the purple and rose interior of the living room to the yellows and oranges of a forest in autumn, shows us Paul caressing the trunk of a tree, presumably in his sacred grove.

The last of the three, which by chronology would be the first, shows his rebirth in the heavens. This episode is fused with the interior action, while the other two had been sudden ruptures. The reincarnation comes at the climax of a scene in the kitchen where the young mother seems entranced. She speaks through billows of smoke. The words that she speaks on the soundtrack are physically fragmented by the film-maker's cutting into the sound tape and deleting parts of the utterance: "Our air/ sent thro . . . sun's golden/ por . . . and descended/ invi . . . move . . . lea. . . ." The words "through," "pores," "invisible," "movement," and "leaves" have been fragmented. First we see brief flashes of his navel (two frames) and of the Milky Way (two frames). Very gradually the length of these shots increases, and they vary so that in superimposition Paul unravels from a fetal position in the Milky Way and in Saturn. His chest and back appear in the disk of the sun, then his head. The images of astronomical rebirth are scattered through the scenes of the mother in smoke, so that they appear as illustrations of her prophecy.

Before the scene of the hero's heavenly regeneration, the voice of the mother had asked him why he kept seeing the Physician. The remaining digressions, or framed episodes as he wanders through the house, are, as if in response to the question, a review of the encounters of the two men meeting in the rain, walking together, and visiting the classical sculpture gallery of a museum.

Within the house the numerous murals, richly painted walls, velvet and elegant wooden and straw furniture, golden cupids in relief, and other decorations of a visually lush nature form the background for the hero's wanderings. The transitions to bright exterior scenes or to subdued interiors, such as his lover's blue apartment, create a dynamic visual counterpoint.

At one point we see Paul asleep in a chair. A book, *Prince of Darkness*, lies in his hand. What follows may be his dream: his young mother in a white wedding dress hovers over his dead body, which is stretched out on a rock beside the sea. Part of her dress covers his naked loins. At the point when her lips touch his face in a kiss, the film-maker cuts to an extreme close-up of a white cat licking his chops. The death by sea is one specific reference to the imagery of Euripides. On the other hand, the presence of his mother in her wedding dress recalls the pursuer of *Swain*. In the next scene, we find Paul stretched out on a bed, stroking the cat; a further indication that the previous image was his dream. Yet in *Twice a Man*, past, present, and future, dream and waking, are so fused that they dissolve as distinct categories of experience or thought; they exist within the perspectives of the film as flavors of experience.

From the scene in the bedroom to the end of the film, the center of reference oscillates between the Artist-Physician and the two mothers. The old one appears more frequently now. At one point both mothers even appear on the bed with Paul.

That shot is interrupted by a spectacular recapitulation of seventy-seven shots, each only two frames long, of clips from the beginning of the film up to that point, more or less in the order they had first appeared. The entire passage blazes by in less than seven seconds. This sudden explosion of images initiates the drive toward the climax of the film. At the end of it, the montage slows down for a moment, briefly reorienting itself in the house as Paul comes out of a bath, but within a few seconds the scene shifts again to the corridor of an opera house or theater, where Paul sits at the top of a staircase, his lover beside him. As the lover's finger traces the line of the hero's profile, from his forehead past his nose, a second recapitulation occurs, this time of thirty two-frame elements in a somewhat more scrambled order. His lover takes his hand. While a new sequence from the mother's house begins to assert itself, we see Paul simultaneously standing up and collapsing to the ground, as bits of each movement are intercut.

Back in the house, the bathroom episode is intercut with a complex scene of the two mothers, seen individually, and reflected through a mirror, reaching out to touch the hero's cheek as he shaves. The scene gradually shifts from the mirror to a final location, an empty ballroom. Here we see Paul dancing by himself, with a superimposition of shimmering crystals as if from a chandelier above his head. His lover is reflected in the glass of a mirror column. He dances until he collapses. His lover comes to kiss him, as his mother had done. As he lowers his head toward the protagonist, whom we assume to be dead now, his face completely intermeshes with his in superimposition, so that we see two people but one face. He kisses him. When the Artist-Physician lifts his head away, the image of the hero's face cracks, like broken glass, and the pieces fall away leaving a white screen, where at first there had been only black.

Markopoulos conceived *Twice a Man* as a film with synchronous dialogue. Throughout the film we see people talking, but cannot hear them. In *Film Culture* 29 he wrote up some of his notes from the shooting in the form of a tentative script. Here is part of the scene of the two mothers by the mirror:

> Cut to the young Olympia and her son seen through a magnificent mirror. We see the son's face and Olympia is a hazy image in the background. We hear her ask:
> Why do you keep seeing the physician?
> The son, Paul, in the same composition, turns and looks towards the sun's rays—a long ray glistens to one edge of the film frame, and we hear him say:
> When you get to like a man's face,

> There's nothing you can do about it.
> The scene changes to the aged mother before the mirror. Now she is seen through her mirror. Slowly, exquisitely, in profile she raises her hand as if to touch Paul—he falls into frame. In the mirrored shot we see his face covered with shaving cream. The aged mother's hand touches his face, and draws away. Cut to the young Olympia. There is cream on her fingertips. Paul is by her side. Slowly she goes to touch his lips. As she turns her hand away towards the rays of the sun, Paul grabs it, and as if in a dream, tilts it toward the camera lens. He holds her outstretched hand, saying:
> Mother!
> Cut to Olympia, the younger. She raises her hand. Cut to the aged Olympia. She is alone before the mirror, her hand held high in the air. There is no one there.[8]

He edited the film sequentially from beginning to end without revision. Markopoulos had the cosmic rebirth scene printed first "to see if it would work." Then he ordered the whole silent print. By this time, he had decided to discard synchronous sound and use the voices of Paul, his young mother, and perhaps his lover. When his protagonist failed to show up for a recording session, he decided to use only the single woman's voice. Finally he hit upon the idea of fragmenting her words. In "The Driving Rhythm" he describes this process more dramatically: "Originally dialogue was to be utilized, until I decided in favor of the more powerful motif of thunder."[9]

He does use several claps of thunder in the film, as well as bursts of rain, and the sound of shattering, cracking ice in the final image. He also placed snatches from the third movement of Tchaikovsky's *Manfred* at several points in the film. Earlier in *Psyche*, he balanced silence and sound by stopping the music for the blue reverie; in *Swain* he keeps the film silent until the hero approaches the house, and then the music begins.

The words of *Twice a Man* begin as Paul enters his mother's house. They continue through the various scenes in the house as if it were haunted by fragmentary echoes. Rather than making the words meaningless, the fragmentation creates new ambiguities and an aural tension. The ear rapidly reconstructs the broken words.

Markopoulos completed *Twice a Man* in 1963, just in time to enter the third Experimental Film Competition at Knokke-le-Zoute in Belgium, where he won a $2000 prize. The film came at the high point of the mythopoeic development within the American avant-garde. Brakhage had finished and was exhibiting the first two sections of *Dog Star Man* by then; Jack Smith was still exhibiting the year-old *Flaming Creatures; Scorpio Rising* appeared almost simultaneously with *Twice a Man*. The shift from an interest in dreams and the erotic quest for the self to mythopoeia, and a wider interest in the collective unconscious occurred in the films of a

Gregory Markopoulos: *Twice a Man*. Paul and his mother in a fusion of marriage and mourning. Copyright estate of G. J. Markopoulos, courtesy Temenos Archive.

number of major and independent artists. The mythopoeic film need not evoke a classical myth or compare different myths, although it may do either or both. Mythopoeia is the making of a new myth or the reinterpretation of an old one. In the world of myth, which all these films share, imagination triumphs over actuality, and this imagination is unqualified by the perimeters of dream or delusion, as it is qualified in the trance film.

So strong was the impulse to create a mythic cinema that all the artists I have just mentioned immediately plunged into new myth films after completing the films named. Brakhage continued to work on the three remaining sections of *Dog Star Man* until 1966; Jack Smith shot *Normal Love*; Anger sought to repeat *Scorpio Rising*'s form in *Kustom Kar Kommandos*. Finally Markopoulos, now confident in the maturity of his form, began the Prometheus project, which he had wanted to make since his USC days.

During the making of *Twice a Man*, Markopoulos began publishing his most important theoretical articles. He had written and published on film throughout his career, but the articles since the early 1960s embody his mature vision of cinema; he tacitly recognized this himself by including nothing written before 1962 in his collected articles, *Chaos Phaos* (Temenos, Florence, 1971).

In "Towards a New Narrative Film Form," he discusses the montage system of *Twice a Man*. After criticizing the conventional sound cinema for its neglect of the "film frame" and for its failure to achieve a "poetic unity" of word and picture, he speaks of his newly created editing style:

> I propose a new narrative form through the fusion of the classic montage technique with a more abstract system. This system involves the use of short film phrases which evoke thought-images. Each film phrase is composed of certain select frames that are similar to the harmonic units found in musical composition. The film phrases establish ulterior relationships among themselves; in classic montage technique there is a constant reference to the continuing shot; in my abstract system there is a complex of different frames being repeated.[10]

Earlier in the article he had rejected the use of filters, anamorphic lenses, laboratory effects, and even costumes as significant elements in the formal organization of films. Thus he grounds his polemic in the central theoretical dialectic of the American avant-garde film. Deren, as we have shown in the second chapter, sought the essence of cinema in the very mechanics of the filmic materials and equipment. She defined the art of cinema as the manipulation of space and time as it was recorded by the camera. For her, fast and slow motion and the use of negative were legitimate tactics, while graphic imagery and anamorphosis were not, because the former were tied directly to the conventions of the camera and the latter were expressionistic or surrealistic distortions of its function.

Although he did not elaborate his opposition to this position in theoretical articles, Sidney Peterson in practice made a cinema in which the representation of space was purely a function of the will and the imagination of the film-maker rather than a given of the lens. Polemically, Stan Brakhage became the theoretical expositor of this position, as we shall see in the next two chapters. For Brakhage, indeed, one primary responsibility of the film-maker as an artist is to overcome imaginatively the built-in predispositions of the equipment as it is standardized and manufactured.

The argument about the ontological status of the spatial image in cinema has animated most of the theory of the American avant-garde. For instance, when James Broughton wrote, in his note to *Mother's Day*, that "from the beginning I accepted the camera's sharply accurate eye as a value rather than a limitation . . . I decided to make things happen head on, happen within the frame, without vagueness, without camera trickery" he aligned himself with Deren's position and implicitly distinguished himself from his former collaborator, Peterson. Anger never took a public stance on this issue, but his films, through *Scorpio Rising*, depend upon a spatiality that originates with Deren. In fact his most Deren-like construction, *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome*, marks a turning point in his practice. In the original version from 1954, montage and the correlation of offscreen

vectors perform the whole work of synthesis; but when he re-edited it in 1966, the elaborate use of superimposition introduced a new type of synthesis, within the spatial dimension, which he continued to explore in his later film, *Invocation of My Demon Brother*.

Markopoulos has always focused his energies on the reconstruction of time in his films and has tended to accept the givenness of cinematic space even when his work on single-frame montage within the camera led him to superimposition. His theoretical exploration of the operation of the single frame begins with the investigation of its representation of psychological complexities and subtleties, but it quickly moves beyond that. In the later essays he assigns it an hieroglyphic significance which puts into question the authority of cinema's representation of movement itself.

The evolution of his thought on the function of the single frame corresponds to a change of its function within his work. In *Twice a Man* the single-frame montage grows out of the recapitulatory passages in *Psyche, Swain*, and *Serenity*. Since the whole film is inscribed within the memory of the Artist-Physician, the single-frame clusters tend to represent complexes of his remembered past, while the variations which mark the transitions between shots can be interpreted as proleptic movements in the mind's narration to itself of its own history. In the later films this psychological representationalism disappears. In *Himself as Herself* and *The Illiac Passion* this method of montage will undercut the illusion of the temporal autonomy of a scene or the narrative autonomy of a single mythological episode. In *Gammelion*, Markopoulos abolishes the "continuing shot" as a matrix for the single-frame cluster and invests totally in the "hieroglyphic" power of the static frames. In these later works the film-maker continues to see cinematic structures as a model for the human mind but he no longer accords a privileged place to the category of memory within that model.

Markopoulos continues his essay with a discussion of the visibility of the single frame. Then he enumerates its advantages:

> Limitless change in rhythm, or the sudden interjection of alliteration, metaphor, symbol, or any discontinuity introduced into the structure of the motion picture, makes possible the arrest of the film spectator's attention, as the film-maker gradually convinces the spectator not only to see and to hear, but to participate in what is being created on the screen on both the narrative and introspective levels.[11]

In "The Filmmaker as the Physician of the Future," he suggests a spiritual force within the avant-garde film movement tantamount to its having curative effects: "the New American Cinema Film-maker is a physician of images, the first of his kind." The characterization of the lover in *Twice a Man* as the Artist-Physician comes to mean more in this context than the fusion of the idea of the film-maker with the myth of Asclepius.

"From film to film," Markopoulos writes, emphasizing the continuous process of the artist's work, "the creative film-maker as opposed to the commercial film-maker, offers to the creative film spectator (a recently realized species) with each film conception that murmuring vibration which after a time, from film work to film work (I think of Brakhage, of Harrington, of Stroheim, of [Jack] Smith) becomes the congeries which reveal this self-same film spectator's Being."[12] He offers two instructions for the audience in viewing his films (this essay was read as a lecture before a screening of *Through a Lens Brightly: Mark Turbyfill* and *Himself as Herself*):

> A—Do not attempt to single out any one film frame or series of film frames passing across the screen, and thus neglect others. Such abstraction would lead to a total misunderstanding of either film.
>
> B—To view the film as image composed to image, regardless if it is only a single frame. It is the Invisible that the film spectator must seek. This Invisible will lead him forwards and backwards and ultimately towards the Future: the future in this case is the understanding of the films.[13]

The application of his confidence in the montage of *Twice a Man* came with the making of *The Illiac Passion* and *Himself as Herself*. Although the latter film was made and edited after the former, it was printed and released first. Before either film was released, the film-maker finished and showed *Galaxie*, a collection of thirty portraits, and *Ming Green*, a study of his apartment.

In *Himself as Herself* Markopoulos offers a tour-de-force concentration for one hour of film on a single character, who manifests alternately a male and a female *persona*. Perhaps the limitation to a single figure was a reaction to the handling of almost thirty characters in *The Illiac Passion*.

Himself as Herself takes Balzac's *Seraphita* as its source, reducing the five characters to one and transferring the action from the Norwegian coast to an elegant quarter of Boston. Balzac's novel, his most occult work, describes the union of Seraphita and Seraphitus in a single body, feminine and masculine, and his eventual ascension into a Swedenborgian heaven.

The film proceeds statically with some thirteen major scenes, or locations, edited in the same way as *Twice a Man*, but without any recapitulation or framing devices. It opens with the protagonist dressed in a tuxedo, as he is through most of the film, and operating an electron microscope. The repeated and puzzling alternation of a beautiful fan and a gilded human foot punctuates the scene. The interior scenes of *Himself as Herself* are as elegant as those of *Twice a Man*, but they suggest much greater wealth. We first see the hero inside, beside a fireplace, where he finds a ring and reaches out as if to embrace someone who isn't there. Our first view of his female manifestation occurs next when his intercut ascent

and descent in a hand-operated elevator shows him alternately in his tuxedo and in a woman's sari. He lightly touches stuffed birds and cowers in fear as a live parrot looks on. Then, in a central and revealing scene, the protagonist crawls undressed under a fur piece to sleep. A mysterious hand strokes his hair; unidentified lips kiss him.

The transition from one episode to another is gradual. The use of single frames prolongs the change of scene which by contrast had been relatively rapid in *Twice a Man*. The occasional choice of close-ups, such as the foot and the fan near the beginning, as the central shots of a scene, further separates the significant actions of the protagonist and gives the film a static quality despite the flickering of its montage. A fine glass is broken on the rug, and a bobby pin appears in one such scene of close-ups. Furthermore, the sensual attention to objects by both the camera and the protagonist reinforces the stasis. He sits next to a glass cabinet in which a wedding dress (again!) is displayed. He is handling a woman's white shoe.

Markopoulos makes more use of the offscreen look and gesture as a force unifying the different locations in this film than in any other. The protagonist finishes writing a letter, signs it with the pressing of a flower on the page, and reaches out offscreen, as if to the single-frame echoes of his female self in the previous scene in the garden. In the climax of the film, both male and female *personae* seem to come together and embrace on a staircase. Markopoulos achieves this while maintaining a sense of their individuality by very rapidly intercutting from the masculine to the feminine as they move toward the same point on the staircase. A final scene brings the hero to a religious ecstasy as he falls to his knees, beating his heart and apparently crying, in Boston's Trinity Church. The *Gloria* of Poulenc, heard before and during the titles, accompanies this scene.

Robert Lamberton has found sources for the images of *Himself as Herself* in Balzac's novel, from which he offered the following excerpts:

> It always hurts me to see you use the monstrous wisdom [science] with which you strip all human things of the properties conferred on them by time, space and form, to consider them mathematically under I don't know what pure expression, just as geometry acts upon bodies whose solidity it abstracts from them.
>
> Seraphitus undid his sable-lined cloak, rolled himself in it, and slept. . . . To see him thus, wrapped in his usual garment, which bore as much resemblance to a woman's peignoir as to a man's coat, it was impossible not to see the delicate feet which hung below as those of a girl . . . but the profile of his head must have seemed the expression of human force brought to its highest degree.[14]

In a note for the Film-Makers' Cooperative catalogue, the film-maker refers to the theme of the film:

> The film's point of departure and inspiration is from de Balzac's famous novel *Seraphita*. While de Balzac's novel depicts with grave Swedenborgian overtones the ecstasies of a hermaphrodite, Markopoulos's own *Himself as Herself* depicts the tragic situation, typical to the day, and one might say especially of the American scene of that black-tie Athenianism that is prevalent on the Eastern Seaboard. Indeed, a denial of one's self. *Himself as Herself* begins in the laboratory which contains an electronic microscope at Boston University and ends at Trinity Church.[15]

And in an interview with Jonas Mekas he says, "The clue to the whole film is the tuxedo that the protagonist wears. You see, it's a certain strata of society. That's my first social comment." *Himself as Herself* is Markopoulos's most mysterious film. These clues hardly clarify the mystery. They refer, I believe, to a level of the film which can be paraphrased as the spiritual crisis and revelation of a man who at the beginning lived and thought superficially. The film moves from science (the electron microscope) to religion (the church), and its turning point is a scene of ambiguous love-making (the fur piece). Markopoulos once contrasted the revelations of American avant-garde films with those of science, saying that the viewing of certain films "becomes an inevitable religious act: containing all that the Sciences, various as they are, very often do not contain, and often as not do not communicate to the average spectator."

The "clue" to *Himself as Herself*, despite what its maker has said, is not the tuxedo or the social status of its hero. Its mystery is more fundamental than that and rests in the end upon Markopoulos's unique conception of the relation of cinema to literature. When asked, for what must have been the thousandth time, about the relation of his films to the French *nouveau roman* by the Voice of America, he answered:

> I don't think it's the film-makers that are being inspired by the latest gimmickry of the French novel, such as Robbe-Grillet and company. I think what is happening is the image which, you know, for thousands of years was trying to replace the use of the word has done that, and the novelist just have no way out. They have to imitate film. . . . You have to go all the way back, you know, to hieroglyphics. We're back at that interesting stage, and I think that's where vital communication can come into effect. . . . A film is made up of a series of frames. These frames can be used to a psychological purpose. I mean, literally, the single frame—and they do not become subliminal. You can actually see a single frame on the screen. It's just a matter of,

> you know, even the theatre-going film spectator becoming accustomed to this sort of thing. But, you see, in my kind of work, in about . . . two seconds, I can release how many frames and reveal an emotion, an idea, or anything you can think of.[16]

In his references to hieroglyphics, Markopoulos is suggesting that picture narrative ontologically and historically precedes verbal narrative and that the invention of the motion picture camera made possible a revival of this ancient and fundamental form of expression. The novel, then, would be a secondary attempt to translate cinema, even before its mechanical invention, into words.

In *Himself as Herself* Markopoulos has relied more than in any other film on the "hieroglyphics" of cinematic imagery to assume the burden of narrative. Its companion piece, *Eros, O Basileus* (Eros, The King), was made shortly after *Himself as Herself* and released at the same time. Although the film-maker has never formally coupled the two films, they complement one another. *Eros, O Basileus*, too, has only one character, who appears naked in most of the film's nine tableaux. His sexual presence and confidence on the screen are very much the opposite of the introspective androgyne of the other film. The objects he touches—books and paintings—are the icons of the creative spirit; there is also a camera and rewinding equipment in the film. When the protagonist slowly strikes the pose of Eros and shoots imaginary arrows from an invisible bow, one feels not so much the presence of the god as a mannerist tension between the naked youth and his role, a tension reminiscent of the grinning nude San Giovanni Battista of Caravaggio.

Before he shot *Himself as Herself* Markopoulos said it would be edited in the camera. Later he changed his mind. *Eros, O Basileus* was constructed while shooting with a limited amount of editing afterwards. The formal innovation of that film for Markopoulos is its punctuation by fade-outs made in the camera, not as terminal points, but as phrase-markers within a single camera set-up or shot. Markopoulos worked from August to October 1966 on these fades.

The film-maker resurrected the discipline of making films without post-editing in 1966 when he shot his collection of portraits, *Galaxie*. The previous year Stan Brakhage had completed and screened a series of portraits of his family, other artists, poets, and ending with a portrait of the film-maker Jonas Mekas—all in 8mm. That collection of portraits, called *15 Song Traits*, was incorporated within his serial film, *Songs*. Somewhat earlier Andy Warhol had put together two sets of short facial portraits—one take to a person—called *13 Most Beautiful Boys* and *13 Most Beautiful Girls*; he had also done a feature-length, full-figure portrait of Henry Geldzahler, the art critic and curator, smoking a cigar. Of the forty portraits Markopoulos shot, thirty were incorporated into his finished film. A year later he did a single portrait, about twice as long as the others, called *Through a Lens Brightly: Mark Turbyfill* (1967).

In making the portraits his method had been to select an object or an activity with personal significance to the subject. Carefully watching the frame-counter on his camera, he would expose a number of takes of one image interspersed with blackness, achieved by covering the lens with his hands or the lens cap for as long as he wanted, or by using the automatic fading mechanism of his Bolex camera, all with different nuances. He would then rewind the film and expose the units of the next view, detail, or object. In the finished portraits, each of which lasts for three and a half minutes, or the time of projecting 100 feet of film, each image has its own metrical pace, which alternates with or is superimposed upon the others. Three factors determine that a film made this way will have a texture more muted and less marked by "collision" montage than the post-edited films. First, a certain calculus of change is inherent in the method; its limits are controllable, but as the control gets more and more precise, the subject must become more static and the intervals more regular. Second, the inevitable superimposition of junctures makes for softer transitions. Third, the method from the first implies a stationary subject, while it absolutely excludes such radical collisions as change of film stock, mixing black and white with color, and switching to negative, all of which Markopoulos has done at one time or another in his career.

In *Ming Green* (1966) Markopoulos gives us a portrait of his apartment. Through the window we see trees. After a short moment of blackness we see the trees again, with still other trees superimposed. Then a view looking down at the garden below is intercut with blackness (eleven frames of the garden eight times, with a variation of nine to thirteen frames of black in each interval), giving the impression of a winking image. On the eighth view of the garden the trees reappear in superimposition.

Within the room, a close-up of the buds of a flower in a vase quickly shift focus. A bright red chair at a typing table alternates in flashes, at times in superimposition, with books on the window sill. Then several views of the window appear at the same time in a flood of light. A composition with record jackets, two red chairs, and a lamp alternates with a rose. The rhythm varies in overlapping waves from long holds to quick flashes. Several compositions of the full room show the Ming green walls from which the film takes its title. A bookshelf, a red drum, and an orange drape "wink" in syncopation on the screen. Then a different bookshelf appears with superimpositions of the plaster texture of the wall and a close-up of a casually thrown white shirt. Finally, over recurrent flashes of the orange drape, a framed photograph of the film-maker's father appears. The white shirt appears in eight-frame-long flashes over a dim photograph of the film-maker's mother. The superimpositions end; there is a clear hold on this photograph. When it goes out of focus, the film ends.

The orchestration of color, the controlled metrics of the flashing and superimposing images, the sureness of the composition, and the careful placement of musical excerpts make this film one of Markopoulos's most successful achievements of in-the-camera editing. With unusual structural

control he builds the intensity of his images from the opening with trees and garden, through the pivotal introduction of the red chair, to a sentimental but in no way maudlin climax with the shirt and photographs.

In his article, "The Event Inside the Camera," he reminds us of the technical achievements of George Méliès and D. W. Griffith in creating effects within the camera. He lists the advantages of this method of working:

> The event inside the camera leads, according to the technical and aesthetic skills of the filmmaker, to: (a) editing; editing directly in the camera; (b) creating effects, filmic nuances, with the camera itself. The advantages of editing in the camera have economic and aesthetic values; for by editing in the camera one must be more and more exact; the idea and the image more concentrated; the result a more brilliant appeal to the mind and dormant senses.[17]

As Markopoulos indicates, one cannot discount the economic advantage of editing within the camera. By comparison to any other genre, school, or period of film-making, the new America film artist creates his works with an astounding economy. Still, the cost of paying laboratories to print films (and Markopoulos had his splicing for *Twice a Man, Himself as Herself*, and *The Illiac Passion* done in a laboratory according to his precise indications on the frame) and the expense of raw materials, developing, and renewal of equipment, is an enormous and often defeating financial burden on an individual without outside aid. Thus for the prolific artist, editing within the camera has a decided financial advantage, particularly for Markopoulos, who had first used this method in *Lysis* and *Charmides*. He revived this method after editing *The Illiac Passion*, while that film was sitting in the laboratory awaiting splicing and a complex form of printing that would have cost tens of thousands of dollars if he had not reformulated his conception and relinquished his desire for certain special effects.

The Illiac Passion culminates fifteen years of successive projects for a film based on the Prometheus myth. The first script the film-maker prepared for it appeared as early as *Swain*. At the beginning of that film the hero picks up the script in a field and dances with it in fast motion, just before the intercutting of the dead bird and mating alligators.

In a text written around 1949, he speaks of his aspiration toward "my ultimate universal films":

> "Prometheus" would be in color. In the opening scene a figure of "Prom" would appear alone in a great valley and there he would symbolically nail himself to the "world" by raising his hands to the sky—many figures would come to see him—Poseidon, Io, Hermes, etc. "Prometheus" scenes would be filmed in

one locale—the various other sections would be filmed in various countries. Io in Egypt, Hermes as a medieval figure in England, etc. All of these would be spliced together and we would have a truly "universal" film. There would be no dialogue except at the end, when the camera sinks into the ocean. Prometheus will say, "Behold me, I am wronged." Not only would he say it in English but other voices would be heard as if echoes in other languages.[18]

The title goes back to the mid-1950s, to the section title of his long poem, *Angelica Clamores*. There it was spelled "The Iliac Passion." It refers, of course, to the iliac region of the body where the liver is found, the locus of Prometheus's "passion" and the object of Zeus's torture.

His note for the New York premiere of the film will be the starting point of my analysis:

The Illiac Passion is the odyssean journey of a film-maker amongst the characters of his imagination. That is to say, Markopoulos used as his point of departure the Greek myths, universal in essence, even to the present day, and from these was inspired to discover the various personalities inherent in these mythic themes from everyday life. For his characterizations he selected the exciting personalities which were in the scene, circa 1964–66 in New York City.

The Illiac Passion retells the passions of one man, the figure who crosses Brooklyn Bridge at the beginning of the film, comes to the Mother Muse, then proceeds to the forest in the tradition of, say, all heroes, perhaps, Zarathustra, and there under an apple tree communes with his selves. These selves are recreated by some twenty-five characters; and each character or set of characters relate a complete situation. Yet each situation is summed up as the very Being of the only protagonist in the true sense of the word, the hero of *The Illiac Passion*, who is without name. It is as if the characters were the very molecules which made up the protagonist. It should be noted that Markopoulos continues his intricate and basic complement to classic editing, in his further use of the single frame, as an equally important component in editing: better yet, in telling his story to the New Cinema Film Spectator. As for the narrative: it is taken from the translation of the play *Prometheus Bound* by Aeschylus. Not only is the text read by Markopoulos in a highly original manner which enhances the theme of the film, but he also, at the same time, frequently appears in the film himself. Always urging the film to its natural conclusion. It is like Andre Gide in his most famous novel, *Les Faux Monnayeurs*, reviewing his characters.

> Richard Beauvais—*Prometheus*; David Beauvais—*his conscience*; Robert Alvarez—*Narcissus*; Taylor Mead—*the Demon or Sprite*; Sheila Gary—*Echo*; Mrs. Peggy Murray—*The Muse*; Tom Venturi—*Hyacinthus*; Tally Brown—*Venus*; Kenneth King—*Adonis*; Margot Brier—*Pandora*; Paul Swan—*Zeus*; Wayne Weber—*Icarus*; Carlos Anduze—*Hades*; Stella Dundas—*The Moon Goddess*; John Dowd—*Endymion*; Philip Merker—*Apollo*; Beverly Grant—*Persephone and Demeter*; Clara Hoover—*Io*; Gregory Battcock—*Phaeton*; and the Film-maker Markopoulos.[19]

Like Anger in his notes for *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome*, Markopoulos has several figures in his film whom he does not identify in this note. This may be only marginally successful because, again like Anger, he has sometimes changed the identification from one god to another during the shooting or editing. Finally, in a film with so many characters flashing on the screen in simultaneous groupings, it is not easy to be confident one has correctly identified each figure every time he appears.

One should say at this point that the sorting of the pantheon is not essential to the experiencing of the film. In fact, as the note suggests, the fusion of the gods is more significant than their separate characters, and the form of the film promotes that fusion. Nevertheless, in a descriptive analysis, the individual identifications save lengthy paraphrases and follow the plan of the film-maker.

The whole film is rounded by an image of an iron fence at dawn, which appears at the very beginning and the very end. The permutation of characters in between is the most complex of Markopoulos's career and one of the most elaborate in all of the cinema.

Like *Himself as Herself, The Illiac Passion* has no recapitulation; instead, Markopoulos created several brief scenes in which sets of figures come together in the same frame although their myths are not related. One such scene in the middle of the film shows several characters crossing paths in Central Park; another shows Pandora, Orpheus, the Muse, Adonis, Phaeton, and others doing a slow, circular dance.

For the most part the film presents each myth individually, sometimes intercut with one or two others. In waves all the way through the film, parts of several myths come together, then separate. The action of the myths is continually punctuated by images ranging from very brief to whole episodes of Prometheus. To a lesser but still great extent, it is also punctuated by the recurrence of the Muse or Sprite (a composite for Markopoulos of Aeschylus's Force and Might); and finally the film-maker makes sudden incursions into the film: disentangling Persephone's scarves; taking a light-meter reading on a grand staircase; filming in a broken mirror; or tapping a lamp to give it a pendular swing.

After the initial shot of the fence at dawn, a series of fades introduces many of the pantheon as they walk through New York's Central Park in

a montage that uses imagery interwoven from all the seasons. In flashes, the costumed Persephone runs through the landscape with flowing crepe scarves. Markopoulos decided to introduce the fades after he saw how they worked in *Eros, O Basileus*. The fading continues to the end of the film and assumes a formal role almost equal to that of the single-frame transitions of images.

On the soundtrack we hear the film-maker's voice reading from Thoreau's translation of Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*. He selects words for repetition as he reads, making the literal sense of the text thoroughly abstract. Markopoulos's rendering begins: "I, I, I, I contemplate far bounding earth, earth, earth, earth unapproached, approached, unapproached, approached solitude, solitude unapproached, solitude, to the unapproached solitude." The primitive, incantatory quality suggests the mysterious reception of the gift of language which Prometheus gave to man more than the complex word formation and periphrasis of Aeschylus's style.

A figure crosses Brooklyn Bridge, whose "adamantine structure" of stone and cable suggests to the film-maker the binding of Prometheus. In a transition of quickly intercut flames (recalling another of the god's gifts to man, fire) the figure encounters the Muse, a middle-aged, benevolent-looking lady posed on a rock. Prometheus himself appears and assumes a position as if bound to a tree, strikingly reminiscent of the Proustian "Prometheus" in Max Ernst's collage novel, *La Femme 100 Têtes*. The Sprite, or Demon, the most humorous character in the whole of Markopoulos's work, appears on a rock, hooting and gesturing; then he descends to taunt Prometheus at his tree.

Some of the characters of *The Illiac Passion* dress conventionally, while others assume exotic costumes or appear primarily in the nude. The costumes, such as the Sprite's streaming red tassels, Icarus's mosaic wings with encrusted film strips, Poseidon's scuba-diving outfit, or Io's hieratic dress, were created by the film-maker, often with the aid of Jerome Hiler.

I do not have the space in this book to begin an extensive analysis of *The Illiac Passion*. As an index of its complexity, I shall simply enumerate the mythic allusions in the order in which they occur in the film and the montage of parallels, anticipations, and returns by which they are joined.

The first of the myths to be elaborated is that of Narcissus. Here, as with most but not all of the other myths, the presentation is schematic, with narrative dependence on both explicable and inexplicable objects. Narcissus is seen in a bath. A bronze bug appears on his body. He studies his face in a mirror of mica. Narcissus shares his cinematic time with Icarus, who is first seen eating an egg. For a few moments the rush of myths runs together; there are flashes of Orpheus, Persephone, and the Muse within the continuation of Narcissus's self-contemplation. Persephone and Hades making love gives way quickly to the introduction of Daedalus, an artisan with a goatee, who first appears smoking. The last stage of the Narcissus myth occurs with a superimposition of several views of

his nude form dancing and writhing against a background of newspapers. The presentation of his body here, as elsewhere in the film with other figures, conforms to the postures of mannerist painting.

Between scenes of Daedalus in his workshop and a somewhat later scene of him collapsing in the snow as he looks up and offscreen, presumably first at the flight and then at the fall of his son Icarus—between these fragments there are flashes of the female figure Markopoulos calls Echo, wandering in a yard among piles of desks and chairs, and of the Sprite confronting Prometheus. After Daedalus's scene in the snow, we see the body of Icarus lying on a beach as a storm whips up the waves in breakers and foam. Another juncture of myths brings Daedalus, Icarus, Persephone, and Hyacinthus, who is throwing a pencil instead of the traditional quoits, together with a figure of Eros stretching red ribbons like a bow. Out of this cluster, scenes of Icarus come to dominate. We see his wings; then an apple is rolled over his naked body.

The image of the apple found its way into the film through an interesting set of associations, rather typical of the aesthetic transition from literary to cinematic in Markopoulos's work. A friend told him of the Propertius poem (*Book I, Elegy 3*) in which the drunken poet returns home to find his mistress asleep. He playfully rolls an apple over her torso until she awakens and immediately begins to criticize him. In Markopoulos's use of this image, the apple is sensually rolled over the body of Icarus by the film-maker himself. In "The Adamantine Bridge" he miscredits it to Catullus. Before beginning almost every film, Markopoulos undertakes extensive reading, spends weeks in the library, researching sources, versions, analyses. Perhaps he never did so as extensively as for *The Illiac Passion*. An alchemy such as the incident above suggests has been the typical fruit of his researches.

Like *Twice a Man, The Illiac Passion* has scenes shot for synchronous sound and later used silently. The nude figure of Prometheus writhes and speaks, punctuated in the film by the droll image of the Sprite swaying and hollering at the top of a tree. After this pivotal moment, we see no more of Narcissus, Daedalus, Icarus, Echo, Hyacinthus, or Apollo. New figures are introduced, and some who briefly appeared before, such as Persephone, are elaborated later.

Switching between her earthly role as Demeter and her subterranean guise as Persephone (Markopoulos compounded the two), the twin goddess appears superimposed under a fountain. Dressed in brown, she wanders through a forest, makes love with Hades, and feels her way through the mist. Her unearthly movements continue into and through the several scenes of Aphrodite and Adonis, which are the longest in the film. Aphrodite, with obese sensuality, was inspired, Markopoulos has said, by Shakespeare's version of the myth in his poem "Venus and Adonis." Adonis is by contrast a thin youth. We see them in bed, in a quarry where Adonis is sun-bathing, performing a ritual marriage in an empty church,

and smoking a hookah. When she kisses him, the film-maker intercuts the colored flares that occur at the end of a roll of film from overexposure to the light. It is in the midst of their story that we see several figures as if dancing on the beach—the Muse, Pandora, Adonis, Orpheus, Eurydice, and Phaeton. The conclusion of Aphrodite and Adonis coincides with the end of Persephone/Demeter's appearance on the screen.

The recurring image of Prometheus at this phase suggests a painting by Magritte: fire is superimposed as if in the foreground and deep through the outline of his nude back a street receding into the night can be seen. Briefly, an aged Zeus accepts a cup from the naked Ganymede. Poseidon, played by Andy Warhol before a backdrop of two of his large flower paintings, furiously pumps an Exercycle and talks to the naked Prometheus on the floor in front of him.

With the introduction of his hieratic Io, the film moves toward its end. The scenes of Orpheus and Eurydice are intercut with her unheard speech. Orpheus walks out of a tavern in a panic. He and Eurydice appear walking as if out of Hades, with black veils over their heads; when they prematurely remove them, she disappears from his embrace in a series of jump-cuts. Io and Prometheus meet at a lighthouse in the winter, while Orpheus and Eurydice appear in a kitchen eating melon. A hand rests on the fence of the opening shot; when it leaves the frame, the film comes to its end.

The Illiac Passion is clearly Markopoulos's most ambitious achievement so far. To sustain and control such a large and diversified form he called upon all his powers of formal invention. Numerous plans, techniques, and strategies were tested and discarded. Early in the planning of the film he wrote:

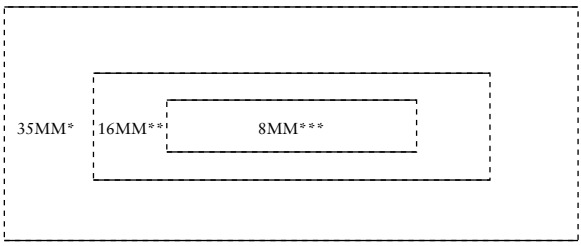
> *Prometheus*, that project of many years, seems to be growing heavily. I think of making each of the characters in *Prometheus*, creating them out of single frames. The Character of *Prometheus* would appear at such a rapid pace that the audience might sit through the filmic movement of the character for an hour and not realize it! Then would follow the movements of the other characters; and finally the final movement, the emotions, interrelated of all the characters, that is the theme, visually, cinematic with sound, would be expounded.[20]

During the first weeks of shooting, he collected leaves, rocks, objects from the scene, which he planned to collage into the film stock as Stan Brakhage had done in *Mothlight* and *Dog Star Man: Part Two*, but the plan was dropped.

All through the editing he wanted to print the film on 35mm with different screen portions assigned to Prometheus and to the myths around him. This plan underwent its own variations, and I do not know what version of it the laboratory was instructed to execute. In a letter of June

26, 1964, long before the shooting was complete, the film-maker drew me the following plan for the printing which will suggest the complexity and expense involved:

> Now, I am so pressed for time; but I do want to show you a diagram of how my film will look on the screen; and hope you will be able to figure it out. Here it is:



> *The 35 mm. will at times appear as a single or longer shots: sometimes superimposed. Both color and black and white. At times the 16mm. frame will be enlarged: and at times the 8mm. frame which will make it grainy: the 8 mm.
> **The 16mm. will be in color and the heart of the film with the greatest variations occurring in that section of the screen.
> ***The 8mm. will be like the most inner consciousness which probably is unreachable.

The laboratory told the film-maker that his plan would cost tens of thousands of dollars to realize. He tried to raise the money. Then, at the end of 1967, just before the fourth Experimental Film Competition Belgium, he very quickly got the footage into shape for conventional printing. In this last-minute change, a film that went to the laboratory originally as three hours long came out lasting ninety minutes. The difference between the film as now seen and the staggeringly ambitious montage that went to the laboratory in 1966 will always be a mystery.

When Markopoulos obliquely writes in his introductory note that "each situation is summed up as the very Being of the only protagonist in the true sense of the word," he identifies himself with the Romantic tradition. That tradition, as I have already stated, and will continue to amplify throughout this book, dominates the aesthetics of the American avant-garde film. It manifests itself differently in the works of the different artists (Anger and Markopoulos are less reluctant than others to embrace Romanticism without reconstruction), but it manifests itself persistently. As Harold Bloom observed of the twentieth century tradition in English poetry, "every fresh attempt of Modernism to go beyond Romanticism ends in the gradual realization of the Romantic's continued priority."[21] Even in his approach to Hellenic mythology Markopoulos follows the strategies the Romantics found most successful; *The Illiac Passion* has less in common with Aeschylus's play than with Shelley's vision in *Prometheus*

Unbound, particularly with the symphonic rapture of its apocalyptic final act. Shelley too saw Prometheus as the unitary man tormented by his divided selves, and he interiorized the Aeschylean conflict. In Markopoulos's modernist inflection of the Romantic Prometheus, the whole struggle with Zeus (Aeschylus's one surviving play of the trilogy; Shelley's First Act) disappears. In the vacuum he has supplied a new dimension: the relation of the film-maker to his film.

The Romantic posture did not rest well with Maya Deren. She struggled against it in her own films, and labeled them "classicist." She opposed Anger and later Brakhage when his work veered toward Romanticism. Her contact with Markopoulos, though, was minimal. When she was exercising some limited power through the Creative Film Foundation, he was in Greece making *Serenity*; she died soon after he returned. They, more than any of the other film-makers I shall be considering, attacked the dialectics of narrative time in their films. Maya Deren devoted meticulous attention to the subversion of sequence and space-time connections. But ultimately her aesthetic of transfiguration is an affirmation of the presence of time in its logical order. Markopoulos cut the Gordian knot; the simultaneity of his narrative structures abolished or at least scorned time. The first approach is a modified classicism, the other purely Romantic.

Harold Bloom has used Hart Crane's phrase "the visionary company" to call attention to the confidence of the major English Romantic poets of the nineteenth century that they were the inspired prophets of a tradition stemming from the Bible and continuing through Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton to them. In Markopoulos's article, "Projection of Thoughts," one finds the following enthusiastic appraisals of the role of the American avant-garde film-maker:

> The film-makers who have banded together under the auspices of the Film-Makers' Cooperative have each and every one of them that divine fire and confidence which the ancient Greeks called *thrasos*. . . . Furthermore, I would venture to suggest that only in the motion picture as an art form and that means immediate and continued experimentation/creativity/inspiration while at work, is there the truth of what we enjoy naming Reality.[22]

Taken as a whole his writings are a continued ode to the process of film-making in itself and as a source of revelation to the film-maker. Everything else, from the audience's comprehension to the finished work of film, is secondary. One is reminded of Sidney Peterson's "A Note on Comedy in the Experimental Film," when Markopoulos describes in "Institutions, Customs, Landscapes" the projection of the rushes of *The Illiac Passion* for the cast and friends:

> This festival of the emotions of the spirit, of the mind, continues week after week. Its intention is perhaps Dionysian, and the

> New Cinema Spectators enter as freely into it as the ancients entered into their Dionysian revels. . . . Often, when the footage projected is a work in progress . . . the New Cinema Spectator finds himself engulfed with a divine frenzy or enthusiasm, sharing the excitement of the film-maker himself.[23]

The first film Markopoulos made after moving to Europe was *Bliss* (1967), a study of a small church in Greece, edited in the camera and reminiscent of *Ming Green*. His next was a long film, *Gammelion* (1968). That film had its origin in a visit he paid to Caresse Crosby's castle Roccasinabalda in 1961 while *Serenity* was being shown as part of a New American Cinema Exposition at the Spoleto Festival. Soon after visiting the castle he prepared a meticulous adaptation of Julien Gracq's novel, *Le Château d'Argol*, with Roccasinabalda in mind. Like all of his detailed scripts, of which this was the last, the film was never made. He wanted to shoot *Eros, O Basileus* there before he settled upon a New York loft as the location.

In the summer of 1967, with enough money for only two rolls of color film—about seven minutes' running time—he went to the castle and shot very short shots of the surrounding valley, the walls, ramparts, gardens, corridors, a red spot that might be blood on the road, the frescoes, etc. Out of that material he made one of his major works.

Gammelion takes its title from the ancient Greek month suitable for marriage. The film is structured by a thousand slow fades in and out of black-and-white leader, which extend its time to 59 minutes. As the screen slowly winks from light to dark and the reverse, tiny shots—sometimes just single frames—are interjected of the landscape around the castle. We gradually move closer and closer to it, view the corridors, glimpse a nude couple in the frescoes, and then move outside again. On the soundtrack there are passages of music from Roussel, the sound of horses' hooves over pavement, and the voice of the film-maker reading Rilke's lines (later repeating them in reverse order): "To be loved means to be consumed. To love means to radiate with inexhaustible light. To be loved is to pass away, to love is to endure."

The impression of *Gammelion* is unlike that of any other Markopoulos film. It is at once terribly spare and very rich. The unmoving images (there may be a slight flutter in the castle's flag, but that would be all), the lack of figures other than the couple in the fresco, who first appear so quickly they might be actual, and the total lack of incident in the film create the aura of a fiction without elaborating any specific fiction. Markopoulos wrote that before going to Roccasinabalda he thought he would make a film that suggested in pictures the sense of smell (as his and other silent films have suggested sounds), but that he gave the idea up before shooting. *Gammelion* does not evoke odors and perfumes; yet it reverberates with a vitality beyond what it explicitly shows. It suggests, through the possibility of blood on the road, through the very emptiness of the

castle which is obviously not abandoned, and above all through the sound, a permutation of novelistic situations as the film progresses. Again the artist seems to have returned, always in fresh ways, to the enchanted house of *Psyche, Swain, Twice a Man*, and *Himself as Herself*.

The making of *Gammelion* in Italy coincided with the emergence in America of a new form, the structural film. In that form the overall shape of a film is its predominant characteristic, as the even sequence of fades is the overriding formal principle of *Gammelion*. The structural film represents in the history of the American avant-garde film as important a development as either the trance film or the mythopoeic film.

In the late 1960s the structural film, and its derivative, the participatory film, followed the mythopoeic form. The causes of this evolutionary shift are too complex to pinpoint. It is certainly not a case of one artist creating something which others imitate. The emergence was too general and was manifest in the works of too many otherwise opposed film-makers for that to be the case, although the question of temporal priorities seems to have been an obsession of the film-makers themselves. Regardless of the cultural factors that caused these shifts, we can see in the films of Gregory Markopoulos both an internal consistency and an evolution parallel to the general evolution of the avant-garde tradition.

Gregory Markopoulos was, from the beginning of his film-making career, an erotic poet of the cinema. If we consider his long films in the order of their making (not their release)—*Twice a Man, The Illiac Passion, Himself as Herself, Galaxie, The Divine Damnation, Eros, O Basileus*, and finally *Gammelion*, we can trace the gradual diminution of narrative, but we see (with the portraits as an exception) a sustained dedication to the definition of physical and spiritual love in cinema.[24]

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six

The Lyrical Film

THOUGH I HAVE proposed that the important stations of the evolution of the American avant-garde film were collective, and not the invention of any individual film-maker, the major exception has been the forging of the lyrical film by Stan Brakhage.[1] The pervasiveness of the lyric voice in cinema among the works of neophytes in the late 1960s, a decade after Brakhage's formative works in that mode, was so great that it seemed that that way of film-making was completely natural and must have existed *ab origine*. Harold Bloom's observation about Wordsworth's achievement could be applied to Brakhage:

> Nor can I find a modern lyric, however happily ignorant its writer, which develops beyond or surmounts its debt to Wordsworth's great trinity of *Tintern Abbey, Resolution and Independence*, and the *Intimations of Immortality* ode. The dreadful paradox of Wordsworth's greatness is that his uncanny originality, still the most astonishing break with tradition in the lan-

> guage, has been so influential that we have lost sight of its audacity and its arbitrariness.[2]

In this chapter I shall retrace the history of the lyrical film through the early evolution of Brakhage's cinema and observe its influence where it has been most fruitful, in the films of Bruce Baillie.

Stan Brakhage is so prolific that it would be impossible to give even a cursory analysis of all of his films in this book. At the time of the first edition of this book, he had made seventy-eight films; by the third edition, he had completed nearly three hundred.[3] Several of those works are made up of separable parts, edited to be complete films in themselves. Five or six years younger than Anger, Markopoulos, and Harrington, he made his first film five years after they started. As an energetic and candid film-maker still in his teens, Brakhage assumed their discarded reputations as the *enfants terribles* of the avant-garde film. Unlike Anger and Markopoulos he did not begin brilliantly; it was only after many films that his work began to approach the intensity of *Fireworks* and *Psyche*.

The 1950s were quiet years within the American avant-garde cinema. The enthusiastic surge of the late 1940s had ended; Peterson had stopped making films; Broughton was in retirement; Deren produced only one film; and Anger and Markopoulos spent most of that decade on frustrated projects. Nor was there a significant influx of new artists until the very end of the decade. Thus the figure of Stan Brakhage, making between one and five films every year from 1952 to 1958 and struggling to create a new form for himself, dominates the history of the radical film during that time.

The version of the erotic quest in all of his early films affirms again and again an unredeemed pessimism, not even momentarily relieved. Freud had never meant as much to any other American avant-garde film-maker. Brakhage even initiated an ambitious *Freudfilm* but failed to bring it off. He was unwilling to accept the trace film as a suitable form until he had reconstructed it on his own terms. These early works vacillate between a dramatic realism and Expressionism.

In his third work, *Desistfilm* (1954), he liberated his camera from its tripod and filmed a teen-age party, with five boys and only one girl. He successfully objectified the argument between Realism and Expressionism that was informing his art. From a beginning in which each of the characters is painfully isolated, though cramped in a small room (one plays guitar, another builds a house of cards, still others make smoke solipsistically, pull lint from their navels, or make a fan of burning matches), the film moves to the teasing of a Pan-like youth, glimpsed at times in the nude. The boys toss him in a blanket and chase him through the woods at night, while a couple remains behind; their discreet lovemaking is seen from behind distorting windows. That distortion is removed with the sudden reappearance of the group, who glare at the lovers in clear focus.

While Brakhage was making his early films he was also directing a theater company composed of the actors who appeared in his films. The

company undertook ambitious projects for summer tourists in Central City, Colorado. After dropping out of Dartmouth College, Brakhage had gone to San Francisco in the hope of studying with Peterson at the California School of Fine Arts. But that year the film program had just been terminated. He returned to San Francisco a couple of years later and took the room of James Broughton, who had left for Europe, in the house of the poet Robert Duncan and the painter Jess Collins, who is known by his first name. His fifth film, *In Between* (1955), his one essay in explicit dream structure, uses Jess as an actor and attempts to translate into cinema the dream world of his art.

In Between takes its title film from the space of fantasy in between the film's framing images of the protagonist sleeping and waking. The dream moves from a neo-classical cloister to an abstract montage of colors, flowers, and cats, ending in a nightmare as a carved animal menaces the dreamer. *In Between* is distinctly minor Brakhage, even when compared to his early achievements. Yet like *Desistfilm* it shows a formal advance; here for the first time Brakhage develops what he called "plastic cutting," or the joining of shots at points of movement, close-up, or abstraction to soften the brunt of montage. Ostensibly this method was first used here to render dream changes, but in later Brakhage films it becomes a formal characteristic of his work.

Brakhage's final version of the trance film appears in four works—*The Way to Shadow Garden* (1955), *Reflections on Black* (1955), *Flesh of Morning* (1956), and *Daybreak and Whiteye* (1957). After these, the form ceased to have significance for emerging avant-garde film-makers. Of the four, *Reflections on Black* is the most complex. *The Way to Shadow Garden*, the most orthodox trance film of the other three, contains the first of Brakhage's "metaphors on vision" in the final minutes, when its hero, overwhelmed by adolescent frustrations, gouges out both his eyes and the film plunges into negative, showing him feeling his way through a garden of brilliant white flowers in a symbolical night. In *Flesh of Morning* Brakhage managed to film himself in a masturbation fantasy. The twin film *Daybreak and Whiteye* opposes a closely held jump-cut view of a woman waking, dressing, and walking out to a bridge—presumably to kill herself—with a subjective view of someone trying to write a love letter and pacing back and forth in a room which looks out on a barren snow scene; the camera is held as if from the subject's position: we only see his hand in the film.

Reflections on Black is a trance film striving for a new form that has not yet been born. The "visions" of a blind man give the film its shape. On a street, he passes a prostitute, ignores her, then enters a tenement. He climbs three stories, at each of which he "sees" in a visionary sense, where fantasy and sight mingle together, three different incidents of erotic frustration. By the time Brakhage made this film, he had begun to transcend the distinction between fantasy and actuality, moving into the cinema of triumphant imagination. The crossing of that threshold came later and at

greater cost for Brakhage than for others, but once he had achieved it, the scope of his investigation of the perimeters of the imagination extended wider than that of any of his contemporaries.

Brakhage tried to reach beyond singular and personal agony by comparing three episodes in *Reflections on Black*. At the same time he tentatively proposed his version of the identity of erotic and aesthetic quests. He affirmed the physicality of the film material within the context of the blind man's "vision." Flashes or film flares—the stippled black-and-white effects that appear at the end of a roll of film because of exposure to and leaking of light—are intercut with the first walk of the blind man. Like the negative in *The Way to Shadow Garden*, they are metaphors of vision. Later, more emphatically, the film-maker scratched with a sharp instrument on the film stock itself, so that a set of brilliant white stars shimmers over the blind man's eyes, changing slightly from frame to frame. By attacking the surface of the film and by using materials which reflect back on the conditions of film-making, Brakhage begins to formulate an equation between the process of making film and the search for consciousness which will become more clearly established in his later work as he gains greater confidence in the truth of the imagination.

In the first of the scenes which the blind man witnesses within his limited imagination, a clear line is drawn between hallucination and actuality. A woman whose love for her husband is frustrated by his bitterness hallucinates that he embraces her while he is shaving, but a puzzled look from him brings her out of her daydream. Next, she thinks he has hanged himself as she sees his shadow in the next room, but he is merely changing an overhead light bulb. We leave her dropping dish after dish (jump-cuts) in her neurosis. At the second story, the voyeur himself takes part in the sexual quest. His eyes see again, and he begins to make love to a woman. When he rests her on a couch, her husband enters, and the white stars

Scratching on film as a "metaphor on vision" in Stan Brakhage's *Reflections on Black*.

appear instantly in his eyes. The final episode is introduced by scratches of stars bursting on black leader, as if we too were seeing through the blind man's eyes. Here the masturbation of a woman is recorded symbolically by an intercutting of her twitching fingers with a pot of water on her stove that boils over.

Reflections on Black was the first film Brakhage made after moving to New York. While he was there, he initiated a new direction in his work almost by accident. Joseph Cornell, the collagist and Surrealist box maker, wanted someone to film the Third Avenue El before its destruction. Parker Tyler gave him Brakhage's telephone number. When Cornell called, according to Brakhage's account, the young film-maker had to admit he had never been on the El. That ended the conversation and, he thought, his election to make the film. But the next day he received in the mail two tokens for the El. Cornell supplied the materials, and Brakhage made *Wonder Ring* (1955).

Faced for the first time with the need to make a film without any skeletal drama or even an actor, Brakhage called upon and amplified the repertory of technical strategies he had used in his earlier work. The free-wheeling camera movement of *Desistfilm*, however, is notably absent. *Wonder Ring* records a trip on the El as if it were a round dance. Its formal texture springs from an alternation of plastic cutting with collision montage, the repetition of shots and of slow panning camera movements, and rippling distortions from an imperfect window in the car. Brakhage assembled the minute parts of his film in a continual flow of movements; not only of the train itself, whose forward motion is inferred from the passing sights outside the window, but also of reflections moving in the opposite direction within the car, and of the bouncing patches of sunlight intersecting both the movement of the train and the inverted movement of its reflection. A continual, lateral rocking motion suggests the rattling of the train to the ear's imagination in this silent film. Finally, the rhythmic structure follows the slowing down and speeding up of the train as it enters and leaves stations; for in those moments all the elements (passing view, reflection, and sun play) reduce, then pick up speed.

The same year Cornell asked Brakhage to photograph a film for him of an old house that he liked which was about to be torn down. The film he made was called *Tower House* until Cornell edited it and renamed it with a phrase of Emily Dickinson's, *Centuries of June*.

The encounter with Joseph Cornell opened a new direction for Brakhage's work. The shooting of *Tower House* and the editing of *Wonder Ring* were his first experiences with the sensuous handling of a camera and the purely formalistic execution of montage. In his works of the following two years we see side by side the purging of the black-and-white trance film—*Flesh of Morning* (1956), *Daybreak and Whiteye* (1957)—and the growth of a more abstract color form—*Nightcats* (1956) and *Loving* (1957). Brakhage was striving in those years to bring into the abstract form the intensity of experience and the complexity of ideas he had

achieved in his modified trance films; and he extended that effort toward synthesis into his theoretical formulations as well. With the making of *Anticipation of the Night* (1958), he forged the new form for which he had been searching: the lyrical film. At approximately the same time, he began writing *Metaphors on Vision*.

The lyrical film postulates the film-maker behind the camera as the first-person protagonist of the film. The images of the film are what he sees, filmed in such a way that we never forget his presence and we know how he is reacting to his vision. In the lyrical form there is no longer a hero; instead, the screen is filled with movement, and that movement, both of the camera and the editing, reverberates with the idea of a person looking. As viewers we see this mediator's intense experience of seeing. In the lyrical film, as Brakhage fashioned it, the space of the trance film, that long receding diagonal which the film-makers inherited from the Lumières, transforms itself into the flattened space of Abstract Expressionist painting. In that field of vision, depth and vanishing point become possible, but exceptional, options. Through superimposition, several perspectives can occupy that space at one time (although it was only after *Anticipation of the Night* that Brakhage began to explore superimposition). Finally, the film-maker working in the lyrical mode affirms the actual flatness and whiteness of the screen, rejecting for the most part its traditional use as a window into illusion.

Joseph Cornell was not the sole influence in Brakhage's creation of the lyrical film. Ten years before *Wonder Ring*, Marie Menken had made her first film, *Visual Variations on Noguchi* (1945). Noguchi had asked her to look after his studio while he was away, and she decided to make an abstract film of her views of his sculpture. With a freely swinging camera, she shot rhythmic movements around the smooth, curved forms.

Hers was one of the most subtle and nuanced inflections of the formal model based upon the perception of an implied mediator. In a remarkable series of disarmingly unpretentious films she demonstrated a rhythmic inventiveness perhaps previously unmatched in the cinema. In *Notebook* she stored fragments from all phases of her filmic career, from the mid-forties to the late sixties. There we can see how, at a time when most of her contemporaries were invoking the Dionysian imagination in their invented imagery, Menken was exploring the dynamics of the edge of the screen and playing with the opposition of immanent and imposed rhythm. The exquisite early "Raindrops" dramatizes the subtle wit of her vision of the perceptual model. As she waits behind the camera for a drop of rain on the tip of a leaf to gather sufficient mass to fall, we sense her impatience and even anxiety lest the film will run out on her; so an unseen hand taps the branch, forcing the drops to fall. Tampering this way with an otherwise straightforward observational film is characteristic of Menken, who cheerfully incorporates the extraneous reflection of herself and her camera, even her cigarette smoke, into an animated fragment and who makes the very

nervous instability of the hand-held camera a part of the rhythmic structure of several films.

In *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* she offers her fellow film-maker a compliment and a complement to *Eaux D'Artifice*. Where Anger had printed his black and white images of the Tivoli garden through a blue filter onto color stock, Menken filmed a visit in his company to the Alhambra, in mid-day, achieving a comparable deep blue tone through the deceptively naturalistic choice of light sources and the conventional blue-sensitive color film stock. The spiraling flight of a pigeon among the rooftops of the Alhambra provides her with an initial rhythmical figure and a metaphor for her wildly eccentric camera movements. Against this she plays a second metaphor, again coyly naturalistic, of architecture reflected in a pool—a metaphor for the cinema's reduction of spatial configurations to a shimmering two-dimensional surface as well as a glancing allusion to Anger's "water works." The circles and swirls that her revolving camera imposes on the Moorish structures can be found translated into the rings that water dropping from fountains make in the pools reflecting the same buildings. This delicate mesh of observation and imposition, which appears in almost all of Menken's films, inspired Brakhage, who radicalized it and systematically explored its potential for the invention of new forms.

Menken and her husband, Willard Maas, were among the first people to treat Brakhage kindly when he came to New York. They were responsible for his first public screening at the Living Theater. Several of the strategies of *Anticipation of the Night* can be found in Menken's *Notebook*. In 1962 she gave it a definitive form. Within that work the sections "Raindrops" (thin rain hitting a pool, a drop slowly forming and falling from the tip of a leaf), "Greek Epiphany" (an Easter procession at night with only the lights of candles and lights of the church visible), "Night writing" (neon lights filmed with such quick movement that they appear to be brilliant calligraphy on the screen), and "Moon Play" (in which the moon seems to dance and jump about in the sky), all prefigure tactics employed in *Anticipation of the Night*.

Both *Whiteye* and *Loving* prepare the way for *Anticipation of the Night*. The subjective posture of *Whiteye* reappears with a new richness in the later film. Again we can only see those parts of himself that the man looking out at the world sees without the aid of a mirror: his arm, and, repeatedly, his shadow. From *Loving* Brakhage takes for his subsequent work a modernist musical structure; in that film he perfected the rhythmic and contrapuntal premises of *Wonder Ring*. The camera sweeps past a couple making love in the grass. No master shot definitely establishes them in an "actual" space. Within the screen's space, they appear so close and in such a network of swift movements that often the viewer cannot separate male from female, decide if it is the lovers or the camera that is moving, or in which direction the movement is going.

The camera finds its way through leaves and branches before spotting

the lovers, but once its sweeping motions catch them, the point of view shifts, and we see the sun, the sky in motion, and the trees as if from the eyes of the active lovers. When a foot presses against pine needles on the ground, the flowing imagery is arrested by a quick series of static shots of other needles, as if to suggest by the abrupt, staccato editing the tickling pain of the foot. Brakhage freely mixes upside-down shots with his other material, and we again become aware of the blended perspectives—film-maker's and lovers'—when he uses a montage of short flares at the orgasmic climax of the short film. In *Loving* the editing is faster than anything Brakhage had done before; there are chains of shots, two, three, four, and five frames long, and often as many as twenty of them form one complex movement.

Brakhage's poetic paraphrase of *Anticipation of the Night* follows the sequence and evokes the spirit of the film:

> The daylight shadow of a man in its movement evokes lights in the night. A rose bowl, held in hand, reflects both sun and moon-like illumination. The opening of a doorway onto trees anticipates the twilight into the night. A child is born on the lawn, born of water, with promissory rainbow, and the wild rose. It becomes the moon and the source of all night light. Lights of the night become young children playing a circular game. The moon moves over a pillared temple to which all lights return. There is seen the sleep of the innocents and their animal dreams, becoming their amusement, their circular game, becoming the morning. The trees change color and lose their leaves for the morn, become the complexity of branches on which the shadow man hangs himself.[4]

Here Brakhage takes up the opening of *Meshes of the Afternoon* and elaborates it in terms of a Petersonian consciousness. We see those parts of the body which a subject sees of himself: the shoulders, the legs, and especially the outlined image he projects in a shadow. For the first time Brakhage fully achieves a dialectical fusion of the image represented on the screen and the film-maker/subject's reaction to it.

The great achievement of *Anticipation of the Night* is the distillation of an intense and complex interior crisis into an orchestration of sights and associations which cohere in a new formal rhetoric of camera movement and montage. The first images of the film counterpoint the soft brown shadow of the protagonist passing through a beam of light coming from an open door and a window with the jittery dance of fast-moving lights at night. In a series of variations the shadows of the protagonist are joined by the shadow of a rose floating in a glass bowl, and the night-lights, continuing their rhythmic opposition, fuse with flares from the ends of film rolls. In the course of the repetition, inversion, and variation of the sequence of shadows, the film proceeds from inside the house outward. The closing of the door recurs again and again throughout the whole first

third of the film, marking the transition alternately with a shot of the slowly swinging wood of the door and with the moving reflection in its window.

The retracing of phrases which gradually move forward reminds one of the syntax of Gertrude Stein's prose, a major influence on him:

> The voice Helen Furr was cultivating was quite a pleasant one. The voice Georgine Skeene was cultivating was, some said, a better one. The voice Helen Furr was cultivating she cultivated and it was quite completely a pleasant enough one then, a cultivated enough one then. The voice Georgine Skeene was cultivating she did not cultivate too much. She cultivated it quite some. She cultivated and she would sometime go on cultivating it and it was not then an unpleasant one, it would not be then an unpleasant one, it would be a quite richly enough cultivated one, it would be quite richly enough to be a pleasant enough one.[5]

In describing the sequence of scenes Brakhage accurately chooses the verb "to become." Although the film plays with the counterpoint of hard and soft montage, as indicated in the opening collision of night and day shots, the major scenes blend into one another in a rhetoric of becoming. The significant transitions of large areas of film, unlike the counterpoint, are forecast in advance by a pattern of camera movement, a drift of colors, or the "soft" preview of a forthcoming image. Like the single-frame montage of Markopoulos' mature style, the editing of *Anticipation of the Night* challenges the integrity of the shot as the primary unit of cinema. In its place, unlike *Twice a Man*, it proposes camera movement as the elementary figure of filmic structure (the static being a rare and special case of movement). By artfully eliding shots with plastic cutting, Brakhage can present a complicated movement spanning actually disconnected spaces as a single unit. The elimination of depth inherent in shadows, night photography, and fast panning motions enhances the concentration of camera movement as a formal unifier. Nowhere in this film do we find the deliberate use of foreground or background figures.

A recapitulation of the initial shadows shows them in inverted order (door, window, doorway). Outside again, the camera catches the rainbow in the spray of a garden hose and blends it, at times harshly, at times softly, with night-lights and flares.

In the course of the subsequent return to the day and night alternation, the sweeping camera passes the arm of a crawling baby. He returns to the infant's motions (again, as in *Loving*, "discovering" him in the garden) until the screen goes white in a close-up of his clothes. The intercutting of the baby's face entering the screen from different directions with wild circular and irregular pans of the flora, calls to mind the opening of *Metaphors on Vision*:

> Imagine an eye unruled by man-made laws of perspective, an eye unprejudiced by compositional logic, an eye which does not respond to the name of everything but which must know each object encountered in life through an adventure of perception. How many colors are there in a field of grass to the crawling baby unaware of "Green?" How many rainbows can light create for the untutored eye?[6]

As the street lamps alternately proceed toward and recede from the camera, the views of the baby become more aerial and distanced. We see him in the context of his garden arena as we never saw the lovers of *Loving*. But here the perspective is clearly the film-maker's, and for him, the attempt to capture the vision of the child was a failure.

A short mixture of what Marie Menken called both "Moonplay" and "Night Writing," here intercut, prepares the transition to an amusement park, where older children take rides in the night. In this passage the dominant range of colors tends to orange. Previously the street lamp images centered in blue, the garden in green, and the shadow-play brown and rose.

Even the shots of the children whirling on rides in the foreground with the lights of the park behind them have next to no depth on the screen. He intercuts the rides on the ferris wheel with those on the whip. The shots of these amusements grow shorter and less frequent as the nervous, jumping images first of the moon, then of the moon over a columned building called "the temple" in Brakhage's working notes for the film, assume the center of attention.

The brown and yellow temple scenes blend with the blue street lamps, photographed in the rain. In this juxtaposition the first shots appear of children asleep, and as the changes grow quicker, the first quick glimpses of exotic animals are seen. The theme of the temple and the moon falls out of this fugue-like structure, leaving a montage of street lamps and sleeping children punctuated by dark passages and red neon flashes.

In this context the close movements following the curved contour of a swan seem like part of a child's dream. The wings flap menacingly. Often in this part of the film the movements of the camera over the sleeping children appear on the screen upside-down.

The street lamps have changed from blue to red. The first images of trees at dawn, intertwined with the children at sleep, indicate that the film is moving to its end. The light grows brighter; the rainy green-blue street lamps pass for the final time; and in the cloudy dawn the protagonist reappears. His hand ties a rope to a tree. Slowly, mixed with moving shots of trees, his bright shadow swings, like a pendulum, as he hangs himself.

By the rigid standard of his subsequent aesthetic, Brakhage has criticized this ending as artificial and therefore wrong. Yet he hastens to add that while making the film (he edited it as he went along) he said to himself and others that he might hang himself for the finale, leaving a note to

attach the footage of him hanging to the end of what he had already edited. He almost did kill himself by accident while filming that episode, he claims, although as a Freudian he interprets the "accident" as willful.

Despite the film-maker's repudiation, *Anticipation of the Night* works beautifully in its totality. It describes the doomed quest for an absolutely authentic, renewed, and untutored vision. The tender rendering of the crawling baby, the riding, and finally the dreaming children offer only momentary solace—and a more profound despair in the recognition of the impossibility of regaining that kind of innocence—to the visionary protagonist, who is seeking a cure to heal the irreconcilable divorce between consciousness and nature that he dreads. In his subsequent films through *Songs* (1964–1970), the estrangement from nature does not lessen; it may even become more acute, if that is possible. In any case, it becomes more explicit, but the film-maker responds less despairingly, with dialectical revisions of that fundamental crisis.

While he was making *Anticipation of the Night*, Brakhage married one of his students, Jane Collum. Many of his films from that point focus on the modalities of married life. In the interview which introduces *Metaphors on Vision*, Brakhage attacks what he calls "one of the most dominant [myths] of this century," that an artist cannot be meaningfully married, with a sketch of how his wife has inspired and helped to make all of his films from the time of his marriage to the publication of that book.

In the interview, the film-maker described the crucial decision for his work after *Anticipation of the Night* as the uprooting of drama from his films. Drama seems to be equated with a superficial view of external actuality for him, and his rejection of it is couched in terms of the Romantic discovery of the instability of the self:

> I would say I grew very quickly as a film artist once I got rid of drama as prime source of inspiration. I began to feel all history, all life, all that I would have as material with which to work, would have to come from the inside of me out rather than as some form imposed from the outside in. I had the concept of everything radiating out of me, and that the more personal and egocentric I would become, the deeper I would reach and the more I could touch those universal concerns which would involve all man. What seems to have happened since marriage is that I no longer sense ego as the greatest source for what can touch on the universal. I now feel that there is some other concrete center where love from one person to another meets; and that the more total view arises from there. . . . First I had the sense of the center radiating out. Now I have become concerned with the rays. You follow? It's in the action of moving out that the great concerns can be struck off continually. Now the films are being struck off, not in the gesture, but in the very real action of moving out. Where I take action strongest

> and most immediately is in reaching through the power of all that love toward my wife, (and she toward me) and somewhere where those actions meet and cross, and bring forth children and films and inspire concerns with plants and rocks and all sights seen, a new center, composed of action, is made.[7]

The idea of the multiple self is also reflected in the working notes for *Anticipation of the Night* which Brakhage published as the fifth chapter of *Metaphors on Vision*, "Notes of Anticipation." There we find the following fragment of a scenario:

> SEQUENCE ORDER FOR SHOOTING THE NIGHT FILM
>
> The rose as it may pertain to self.
> The self reflective among tree shadows.
> The self as a force of water.
> The dance of the twilight children.
> The children's faces in the night backed by artificial lighting.
> The water spots as fallen stars.
> The self reflected in black pools.
> The fires of night.
> The self afire.
> The passage of night events, shifts of scene, explosions.
> The self in a perpetual turn.
> The drunkenness becoming perpetual night.
> The self as God.
> The passages of memory as blocks of light suddenly thrown open.
> The self in parts played out as on a stage.
> The avalanches of white sheets.[8]

This passage is quoted as an index to the mentality of the film-maker, not as a guide to the finished film. Brakhage has repeated in all of his writings and in speeches that his films arose from visions and needs that could not be verbalized. For the chapter "His Story" in his book, he offers a brief preface, "being entirely composed of script and scenario fragments so literrealized that the necessity to visualize them never compulsioned the filming of them." The paradox of all of *Metaphors on Vision* is that it is a film-maker's book about the antagonism of language and vision. The penultimate chapter, "Margin Alien," in which the artist lists the literary, painterly, and musical influences he had to overcome in order to make films, ends "I am thru writing, thru writing. It is only as of use as useless."

In his aesthetics Brakhage has revived and revised the Romantic dialectics of sight and imagination which had been refocused in American Abstract Expressionistic painting and American poetry (particularly in the work of Wallace Stevens) during the film-maker's intellectual formation.

The history of that argument is worth consideration at this time. William Blake championed the imagination against the prevailing epistemology of John Locke, who maintained that both thought and imagination were additive aspects of the verbal and visual memory. Blake wrote, "I assert for My Self that I do not behold the outward Creation & that to me it is a hindrance & not Action"—a forecast of the phraseology of Abstract Expressionism. "It is as the dirt upon my feet, No part of me. . . . I question not my Corporeal or Vegative Eye any more than I would Question a Window concerning a Sight. I look thro' it & not with it." Wordsworth too writes of the tyranny of sight:

> I speak in recollection of a time
> When the bodily eye, in every stage of life
> The most despotic of our senses, gained
> Such strength in me as often held my mind
> In absolute dominion.
> (*Prelude*, XII, 127ff.)

Our philosophies and psychologies have shifted from the naturalism of Locke and his confidence in the senses. For some artists in the tradition of Blake and Wordsworth the eye now had a renewed and redemptive value. As Wallace Stevens puts it,

> The eye's plain version is a Thing apart,
> The vulgate of experience.
> ("An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," 1–2)

Brakhage claims to see through his eyes, with his eyes, and even the electrical patterns on the surface of his eyes. When he decided to become a film-maker he threw away his eyeglasses. At the beginning of his book he argues with the way language constricts vision and with the idea of sight built into the film-maker's tools. In "The Camera Eye," he writes:

> And here, somewhere, we have an eye (I'll speak for myself) capable of any imagining (the only reality). And there (right there) we have the camera eye (the limitation of the original liar) . . . its lenses ground to achieve 19th Century Western compositional perspective (as best exemplified by the 'classic' ruin) . . . its standard camera and projector speed for recording movement geared to the feeling of the ideal slow Viennese waltz, and even its tripod head . . . balled with bearings to permit it that Les Sylphides motion (ideal to the contemplative romantic and virtually restricted to horizontal and vertical movements) . . . and its color film manufactured, to produce that picture post card effect (salon painting) exemplified by those oh so blue skies and peachy skins.[9]

He proceeds with a program for bringing the camera into the twentieth century by distorting its lens, obliterating perspective, discarding the tripod, altering camera speeds, and changing film stocks. He calls for these home-made modifications in the name of the eye, demanding of the film-maker (actually of himself) a dedication to what he actually sees, not what he has been taught to see or thinks he should see. That the resulting version of space corresponds to that of Abstract Expressionism seems not to have occurred to Brakhage. His sense of vision presumes that we have been taught to be unconscious of most of what we see. For him, seeing includes what the open eyes view, including the essential movements and dilations involved in that primary mode of seeing, as well as the shifts of focus, what the mind's eye sees in visual memory and in dreams (he calls them "brain movies"), and the perpetual play of shapes and colors on the closed eyelid and occasionally on the eye surface ("closed-eye vision"). The imagination, as he seems to define it, includes the simultaneous functioning of all these modes. Thus Brakhage argues both with Blake and Locke, but his sympathies are with the former. Like the Romantics themselves, Brakhage's work attempts to refine the visionary tradition by correcting its errors.

The Romantic strain in Brakhage emerges with the creation of the lyrical film and culminates in his essay in mythopoeia, *Dog Star Man*, and its extended version, *The Art of Vision*, which will be discussed in the following chapter. Brakhage began to shoot his epic two years after finishing *Anticipation of the Night*. In the meantime, and through the shooting of that long film, he continued to make short lyrical films that mark one of the great periods in American avant-garde film. In this series of films—*Window Water Baby Moving* (1959), *Cat's Cradle* (1959), *Sirius Remembered* (1959), *The Dead* (1960), *Thigh Line Lyre Triangular* (1961), *Mothlight* (1963), *Vein* (1964), *Fire of Waters* (1965), *Pasht* (1965)—Brakhage invented a form in which the film-maker could compress his thoughts and feelings while recording his direct confrontation with intense experiences of birth, death, sexuality, and the terror of nature. These works have transformed the idea of film-making for most avant-garde artists who began to make films in the late sixties.

Window Water Baby Moving and *Thigh Line Lyre Triangular* record the births of the film-maker's first and third children respectively. Between the two, finished only two years apart, there is a great shift in style: the former treats the occasion almost dramatically, although the montage attempts to relieve the drama which Brakhage obviously felt while shooting the film and seeing his first child born; the latter film centers itself more fully in the eyes of the film-maker as a visual and visionary experience. The difference between them is not simply a measure of experience (seeing a third child born as opposed to the first), but that is part of it.

There is an interplay between the film-maker and his wife in *Window Water Baby Moving* that disappears in *Thigh Line Lyre Triangular*. The poetic fulfillment of that interplay comes at the moment late in the film

when we see the excited face of Brakhage just after the child has been born. His wife, still on the delivery table, took the camera from him to get these shots. Earlier, they had photographed each other during an argument, which Brakhage intercut with negative images of them making love in the film *Wedlock House: An Intercourse* (1959).

In no other film does Brakhage make as much of the reorganization of chronological time; for the most part, his lyrical films exist outside sequential time in a realm of simultaneity or of disconnected time spans of isolated events. *Window Water Baby Moving* begins with images of late pregnancy. The first shots are of a window, framed diagonally, intercut with flashes of blackness. Throughout the film Brakhage uses black and white leader to affirm the screen and the cinematic illusion as one of several tactics for relieving the dramatic tension built up as the moment of birth approaches.

A rhythmic montage moves from the window to the light cast on the water in a bathtub where the pregnant wife is bathing. The camera is static, and the shots remain on the screen longer here than in other films of the same period. After a longish pause of blackness, we see Jane for the first time on the delivery table. At a painful moment in her labor, he cuts from her screams to her smiling face from the earlier episode and follows it with a recapitulation of the window and water shots. He flashes back to the earlier scene nine times, always showing it in a group of shots and always passing from one scene to the other on a plastic cut: for example, the glimpse of a window behind the held-up placenta, near the end of the film, initiates another cut to the window of the opening and a recapitulation of the sunlit images that follow it. *Window Water Baby Moving* ends with shots of the parents and the baby spaced amid flashes of white leader following the rhythmic pattern of the film's opening.[10]

In *Thigh Line Lyre Triangular* we see a radically transformed space. The passages of black and white leader are more insistent; there are twisting, anamorphic shots of Jane in labor; the montage mixes the birth with flaring shots of animals, a flamingo, and a polar bear from the out-takes of *Anticipation of the Night*. The entire film is painted over with colored dots, smears, and lines. The film begins with a painted stripe which seems to open up on a scene of childbirth with labor already underway. Underneath the rapidly changing, painted surface, we see the doctor, the birth, the placenta, the smiling mother, but in an elliptical flow completely devoid of the suspense of the earlier film. Where Brakhage used plastic cutting to switch from present to past or future in his first birth film, he uses the painted surface to smooth out and elide the transitions from the birth to the strange upside-down appearance of the polar bear or the shot of the flamingo.

Although we do not see him in this film, there is no doubt that we are looking at the birth through the eyes of the artist, whose eccentric vision is ecstatic to the point of being possessed. At the time of the birth he was sufficiently self-composed to pay close attention to the subtleties of his

Abstract Expressionist space in Stan Brakhage's *Thigh Line Lyre Triangular* (handpainting over image) and *Mothlight* (collage of organic material in Mylar filmstrips).

seeing while watching his wife give birth. In the interview at the beginning of *Metaphors on Vision*, he explains that

> only at a crisis do I see both the scene as I've been trained to see it (that is, with Renaissance perspective, three-dimensional logic—colors as we've been trained to call a color a color, and so forth) and patterns that move straight out from the inside of the mind through the optic nerves. In other words, in intensive crisis I can see from the inside out and the outside in. . . . I see patterns moving that are the same patterns I see when I close my eyes; and can also see the same kind of scene I see when my eyes are open. . . . What I was seeing at the birth of Neowyn most clearly, in terms of this "brain movie" recall process, were symbolic structures of an animal nature.[11]

In the first chapter of his book Brakhage observes, "This is an age which has no symbol for death other than the skull and bones of one stage of decomposition . . . and it is an age which lives in total fear of annihilation." In *Sirius Remembered* and *The Dead* he searches for a deeper image of death. When his family's dog, Sirius, died, his wife did not want it buried. They left the body in the woods where it froze in the winter and rotted in the spring. Brakhage made periodic visits to it and filmed the stages of its decomposition. The title of his film puns on the memory and the reconstruction of the dog's members.

Formally, *Sirius Remembered* is the densest of his films in the repetitive, Steinian style of *Anticipation of the Night*, and it introduces a new style, which finds its purest expression in *The Dead*. The opening passage resembles a fugue, as one sweep of the camera is followed by another, beginning a little earlier and going a little further, while the third carries on from the first. The speed of these alternations and the sudden changes they make by a reversal of direction, the injection of a brighter still image, or the occurrence of a long pan suggest that the fugue has been transposed to the micro-rhythms of post-Stravinskian music. The similarity of the shots and their reduction through movement to two-dimensional abstractions fixes the attention on their rhythmic structure.

The pattern of rhythms established in the opening shots continues throughout the film as its visual material becomes more complex. The film proceeds through fall to winter to spring, with some reversals and overlapping of the seasons. Brakhage arrests the movement of the winter scenes with flashes of whiteness when the dog is covered by a layer of snow, to affirm the flat screen and puncture the illusion, but here also to suggest an emanation from the dog of pure white light.

Midway the already complex rhythmic structure becomes compounded by superimposition. The second half of the film elaborates an intricate harmonics as the two layers of fugue-like rhythms play against one another.

In this film Brakhage views death as the conquest of the antagonist, nature, over consciousness. He illustrated this antagonism with a story of the visit of two friends during the making of the film:

> Suddenly I was faced in the center of my life with the death of a loved being which tended to undermine all my abstract thoughts of death.
>
> I remember one marvelous time which gave me the sense of how others could avoid it. [P.T.] and [C.B.] came to visit us and C. wanted to go out into the fields "to gather a little nature," as he put it. "Nature" was such a crisis to me at this time that I was shocked at that statement. [C.] made some martinis, handed me one; and [P. and C.], and I all went out into Happy Valley where they toasted the new buds of spring that were beginning to come up, etc., and marched right straight past the body of Sirius either without seeing it at all (any more than they can see my film *Sirius Remembered*) or else they saw it and refused to recognize it. [C.] was envaled in the ideal of toasting the budding spring and here was this decaying, stinking corpse right beside the path where we had to walk, and he literally did not, could not, or would not see it.[12]

In the same interview he describes in detail how a mystical illumination helped him edit the film.

The skeletal head of the dog in *Sirius Remembered* was the first of several conventional images which Brakhage has attempted to redeem from the realm of the cliché by looking at them freshly and presenting them in a novel form. Others are the image of the tombstone as a significant image of death (*The Dead*), the heart as an image of love (*Dog Star Man: Part Three*), and flowers as an image of sexuality (*Song XVI*).

While passing through Paris to work on a commercial project (for a long time Brakhage supported himself and his art by taking commercial assignments), he sneaked his camera into the Père-Lachaise cemetery to film the monumental tombs in black-and-white. During the same trip he filmed people walking along the Seine in color from a slow-moving tourist boat on the river. At the end of a black-and-white roll, he took a shot of Kenneth Anger sitting in a café.

When he returned to America, Brakhage associated Europe, Anger, and the two traditional images, the river and the tomb, with his thoughts on death. He says:

> I was again faced with death as a concept; not watching death as physical decay, or dealing with the pain of the death of a loved one, but with the concept of death as something that man casts into the future by asking, "What is death like?" And the limitation of finding the images for a concept of death only in

> life itself is a terrible torture, i.e., Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* 6.4311: "Death is not an event of life. Death is not lived through. If by eternity is understood not endless temporal duration but timelessness, then he lives eternally who lives in the present. Our life is endless in the way that our visual field is without limit."[13]

He put the three images together—Anger, the tombs, and the Seine—to make *The Dead*.

Nearly every image in the film appears in superimposition, which serves several formal functions which I shall enumerate as they appear, and one poetic function: to make a spectral light emanate from people and things, as if the spirit showed through the flesh and burst through the cracks in marble tombs. Visually, Brakhage relates this effect to a thermal light sometimes visible to the trained eye, and to the Anglo-Saxon allusions to *aelf-scin*, a fairy light that hovers on the horizon at dusk.

The film opens with a pan up a Gothic statue, interrupted by flashes of negative. The black-and-white positive and negative have been printed on color stock, giving them a green-gray tint. From the color footage, only the blues of the water and occasional reds (sweaters, the oars of a rowboat) registered on the composite film. A quick image of Anger in the café changes to a double image of him as the negative is placed over the positive with left/right orientation reversed. The camera moves with fragments of rocking pans among gravestones and crypts upon which sporadic superimpositions briefly appear. This part of the film contains frequent sudden solarizations (the simultaneous printing of negative and positive, causing an instant flash or leap of the image on the screen).

People, in blue and red, strolling along the banks of the river, appear over pans, sometimes upside-down, of the tombs. In this introduction of the theme of "the walking dead," as Brakhage calls these strollers, the tempo changes from slow, to staccato, to slow again, to staccato again, until the scene almost imperceptibly shifts from the superimposition of people with graves to a flow of superimposed cemetery images, a few frames out of synchronization, with its solarizing negative. The negative echoes the slow rocking of the positive images and pursues them like a ghost.

The shifting of visual themes and their gradual evolution through synthesis and elaboration constitute a meditation on death and the spirit in which thoughts, in the form of images, are tested, then refined, and finally passed over. A persistent idea of the light behind the objects of sight haunts the mind's eye of the film-maker and the structure of his film. Through the medium of the river, the stress shifts from positive to negative.

The climax of the film is its breakthrough into negative following the flashes of whiteness. Brilliant, pure white trees in a black sky and dark crypts with cracks of brightness rock across the screen, paced with black leader. The long rocking motions move first in one direction, then another,

shifting with the black shots. There is a long movement containing four black pauses as the camera passes so close to large tombs that the light is completely cut off. The second of these is so long that one thinks the film might have ended. A short finale brings us back to the Seine, and the film ends on a slow movement across the shadow-marked marble wall of the river bank.

In *The Dead* Brakhage uses the vicissitudes of his raw materials—different kinds of film stock, the imperfect printing of black-and-white on color material, the washout effect of certain bright superimpositions—as metaphysical illuminations. Out of the specifically cinematic quality of light as it passes through these materials, he moulds his vision of the light of death. In *The Dead* Brakhage mastered the strategy he had employed limitedly in *Anticipation of the Night* of presenting and rejecting tentative images of the essence he seeks to penetrate. The traditional symbols of the tombs and river and the absolute poles of blackness, whiteness, and negative are the primary metaphors for death which he tests, varies, and rejects. In the course of the film the process of testing, contemplating, and rejecting becomes more important than the images in themselves.

His most radical exploration into the inflection of light through his raw materials initially occurred in response to his oppressive economic situation. When he had no money to buy film stock, he conceived the idea of making a film out of natural material through which light could pass. The clue to this came from his observing the quantity of glue and paint which Stephen Lovi had put on his film *A Portrait of the Lady in the Yellow Hat* (1962). Brakhage collected dead moths, flowers, leaves, and seeds. By placing them between two layers of Mylar editing tape, a transparent, thin strip of 16mm celluloid with sprocket holes and glue on one side, he made *Mothlight* (1963), "as a moth might see from birth to death if black were white."

The passing of light through, rather than reflecting off, the plants and moth wings reveals a fascinating and sometimes terrifying intricacy of veins and netlike structures, which replaces the sense of depth in the film with an elaborate lateral complexity, flashing by at the extreme speed of almost one natural object to each frame of the three-minute film. The original title of this visual lyric, when the film-maker began to construct it, had been *Dead Spring*. True to that original but inferior title the film incarnates the sense of the indomitable division between consciousness and nature, which was taking a narrative form at the same time in Brakhage's epic, *Dog Star Man*.

The structure of *Mothlight*, as the film-maker observes in a remarkable letter to Robert Kelly printed in "Respond Dance," the final chapter of *Metaphors on Vision*, is built around three "round-dances" and a coda. Three times the materials of the moths and plants are introduced on the screen, gain speed as if moving into wild flight, and move toward calm and separation; then in the coda a series of bursts of moth wings occurs in diminishing power, interspersed with passages of white (the whole film

is fixed in a matrix of whiteness as the wings and flora seldom fill the whole screen). The penultimate burst regains the grandeur of the first in the series, but it is a last gasp, and a single wing, after the longest of the white passages, ends the film.

Significantly, in Brakhage's description of his interest in the moth's flight, sight, and functioning as oracular events in his life, he attributes to the appearance of a moth during the editing of an earlier film a liberation from a slump into self-consciousness that stalled his work:

> I was sty-my-eyed sinking into sty-*me*ed in all self possession when suddenly Jane appeared holding a small dried plant which she put down on the working table, and without a word, left me—I soon began working again . . . in the midst of attempts to work, what must surely have been the year's last moth . . . began fluttering about me and along the work table, the wind of its wings shifting the plant from time to time and blowing away all speculations in my mind as to movements of dead plants and to enable me to continue working.[14]

For Brakhage, extreme self-consciousness and the seduction of natural objects are equivalents (which can, as in the present case, cancel each other) since they both inhibit the working process, which is his ultimate value.

In "Respond Dance," Brakhage, adapting Robert Duncan's view of the poet's role as a medium working for the Poet to the situation of the film-maker, writes:

> OF NECESSITY I BECOME INSTRUMENT FOR THE PASSAGE OF INNER VISION, THRU ALL MY SENSIBILITIES, INTO ITS EXTERNAL FORM. My most active part in this process is to increase all my sensibilities (so that all films arise out of some total area of being or full life) AND, at the given moment of possible creation to act only out of necessity. In other words, I am principally concerned with revelation. My sensibilities are art-oriented to the extent that revelation takes place, naturally, within the given historical context of specifically Western aesthetics. If my sensibilities were otherwise oriented, revelation would take an other external form—perhaps a purely personal one. As most of what is revealed, thru my given sensibilities clarifies itself in relationship to previous (and future, possible) works of art, I offer the given external form WHEN COMPLETED for public viewing. As you should very well know, even when I lecture at showing of past Brakhage films I emphasize the fact that I am not artist except when involved in the creative process AND that I speak as viewer of my own (NO—DAMN that "my own" which is JUST what I'm trying, DO try in all lectures, letters, self-senses-of, etc., to weed out)—I speak (when speaking,

> writing, well—that, is with respect to deep considerations) as viewer of The Work (NOT of . . . but By-Way-Of Art), and I speak specifically to the point of What has been revealed to me AND, by way of describing the work-process, what I, as artist-viewer, understand of Revelation—that is: how to be revealed and how to be revealed TO (or 2, step 2 and/or—the viewing process.)[15]

What he reveals in the introductory interview, as the critic and explicator of his own work, is always illuminating and usually pertinent to our analysis of his films. But in the case of *Cat's Cradle*, the film does not support his expression of its theme. Brakhage recounts there how shortly after his marriage he took his wife to visit two friends, James Tenney and Carolee Schneemann, whom he had filmed in *Loving*. The film he shot of that encounter was to contain his observations on the tensions, identifications, and jealousies that it engendered. Yet the film itself effaces psychology and develops through its lightning montage of flat surfaces and gestures in virtually two-dimensional space an almost cubistic suggestion of the three-dimensional arena in which the four characters and one cat might interact, if only the furious pace of editing could be retarded and the synecdochic framing expanded.

The camera does not move. Like the montage at the opening of *Window Water Baby Moving*, the cutting at times follows an imaginary path of sunlight from the back of the cat, to a bedspread, to a bowl of flowers, to the opening of a door, etc. When there is movement within the frame, its direction and pace influence how it is cut. The various gestures of the film (a bare foot on the bedspread, Brakhage walking while buttoning his shirt, Carolee Schneemann painting and washing dishes, Tenney writing, Jane undressing) never seem complete; they are spread out evenly and often seen upside-down or simultaneously through the whole film without sequence or internal development. For the most part these activities are framed to obscure the identity of the performer so that together with the speed of the editing they tend to fuse the two men and two women together and even to create one androgynous being out of all four.

Floral wallpaper, an embroidered pillow, an amber bottle, and the cat's fur mix freely with the human gestures and with recurrent flashes of white leader and emphasize the flatness of the images. Offscreen looks of the human figures and changes of angle in a single subject establish axes of geometrical positioning, but with the rapidity of shot changes these axes spin wildly and eccentrically. The 700 shots in this five-minute film (remember there were some 3000 in the fifty minutes of the highly-edited *Twice a Man*) vary from two frames (1/12 of a second) to 48 (two seconds) with by far the greater number of images under half a second screen time.

Cat's Cradle suggests stasis through, and despite, the speed of the colliding shots. In *Pasht*, made six years later, he again used a very rapid montage (one frame to sixty frame shots—mostly five or six frames), in a

five-minute film for an even more stationary impression. In his blurb for the film in the catalogue of the Film-Makers' Cooperative, Brakhage tells us that the title comes from the name of a pet cat, named for the Egyptian goddess ruling cats. He shot the film while she was giving birth and edited it after her death. Without this guide the viewer would not know specifically what is happening in the film. It begins in black and soon shows a red furry image in the center of the screen—edgeless, undefined, and not filling the entire screen rectangle. Bits of black leader intercut with it make the image flicker like hot coals. The movement within frame is slight, except for fragmentary glimpses of the discontinuous twisting of the fur by an anamorphic lens. The montage unites tiny bits of very similar images. Sometimes a moving orange spot of light appears, reminding the viewer of the cat in *Cat's Cradle*.

The whole screen seems to pulse with variations in the light intensity of the image, the degree of movement, the clarity of the fur, the time of a shot on the screen, and the number of elements in bursts-of-image between passages of blackness. A typical phrase has one black frame followed by six of soft focused fur, another frame of black, three of focused fur, six of blurred fur ending in a flash of light, another black, one bright orange, and three black. As the film nears its end the bursts become longer and the hairs of fur more clearly focused, and at times larger images fill the borders of the screen, almost identifiable as very close views or anamorphic views of a cat scratching or giving birth.

Pasht presents a vision of an organism simultaneously seeming to die and regenerate. It is clearly animal but liberated from the specifics of species and character. The difference in rhythm between *Pasht* and the lyrical films of 1959 and 1960 indicates the general, but not absolute, shift in the film-maker's approach to the lyrical film before and after the making of *Dog Star Man*. *Pasht* and many of the films that follow it substitute an organic pulse for the earlier counterpoint and micro-rhythmic dynamics. In this later phase of the lyrical form, Brakhage seems to want to still the filmic image and catch the shimmering vibrations of the forces that inspire and terrify him.

Fire of Waters operates within a structure similar to that of *Pasht*. Here the matrix is gray instead of black, and its black-and-white images are grainy and thin, with an ascetic denial of visual contrast. The film begins with static lights at night—for again the camera does not move—and flares toward whiteness. The image seems to wait, while a house light or a streetlamp sits on the depthless surface of the screen, for single-frame occurrences of summer lightning. With these flashes the silhouettes of trees, house, and clouds appear. At times only a portion of the screen is dimly lit by the lightning, and at other times the whole screen flashes. The duration of the illuminations varies from one to five frames toward the middle of the film, and when the lightning explosion extends beyond the single frame, there is always a slight variation in each of the frames in which it occurs.

The change of streetlamps, car light, or house lights prefigures each new flash and makes the viewer expectant. A flare introduces a scene of suburban houses in the quivering daylight of a gray sky. Three slow tones are heard on the soundtrack, which had previously been silent. When the film reverts to night, the lightning flashes are edited to follow one another more quickly than in the first section. A final change to daylight accompanies the sound of fast panting.

In a previously unpublished interview with the author, Brakhage describes his thematic and formal concerns in making this film:

> *Fire of Waters*, as its title suggests, is inspired by a little postcard that Robert Kelly sent me when we were searching into the concerns of Being, Matter and Subject Matter, and Source. He sent a card which cut through all my German windiness about it. It said, "The truth of the matter is this, that man lives in a fire of waters and will live eternally in the first taste." That haunted me. First I couldn't make any sense out of it at all, other than that "fire of waters" would refer to cells, in that the body is mostly water and is firing constantly to keep itself going.
>
> That summer we were living at that abandoned theater. I had got a lot of lightning and streetlights on black-and-white film. I took a lot of daytime shots of the houses that surrounded us. There seemed to be an awful foreboding about that kind of neighborhood in which we were then living, which was a typical suburban neighborhood. I remember referring to it and saying "These houses look like inverted bomb craters." I had a sense of imminent disaster which I always seem to get more mysteriously and in a more sinister way in an American suburban area than I do even in New York City.
>
> When I finally came to edit that, which was just before Christmas '64, I was inspired by Kelly's card and I had the sense that the opening shot would come out of pure white leader and then be a streetlight blinking. The blink of the streetlight would set a rhythm which then I could repeat in flashes of both other streetlights and of lightning flashes, and that blink would be source for the whole rhythm structure of the film. I wanted to see how far I could depart from that rhythm exactly and still retain that rhythm as source.
>
> Then, as the whole concept deepened, I showed the actual source of those night house lights and house shadows by showing the daylight scenes of them. Then I could throw it back into the night with a build-up of the night structure, and then finally end with that one single house that dominated most of my concerns, directly across the street from us.

> Then I felt the need for sound. For years I had imposed the discipline on myself that if ever a single sound was needed anywhere on a track to go with an image I would put that sound in even if no other sound was needed in the whole film. That permitted me when I felt the need of slowed-down bird sounds (that is a bird's cry slowed down so that it became like a western musical instrument), to put it in where I felt it was needed. Then that caused me to feel the need of a sound of wind rising to a certain pitch at the very beginning. At the end then the speeded-up sound of Jane giving birth to Myrenna occurs on two levels in the last shot of the house. It definitely sounds like a dog in somebody's backyard in the drama sense of that scene, yelping in pain. It does actually carry the sense of a terror beyond that. That's how the sound came into it and balanced out.[16]

Brakhage had made one other sound film since *Anticipation of the Night*. *Blue Moses* (1962) uses strategies from the lyrical film without itself being a meditation firmly postulated in the eye of the film-maker. For this one time in his career he employed synchronous speech. The existence of this film within Brakhage's filmography is very curious; there is nothing else like it in his work. It explicitly postulates an epistemological principle: that there can be no cinematic image without a film-maker to take it and that the presence, or even the existence, of the film-maker transforms what he films. Formally, *Blue Moses* anticipates the participatory film that calls upon or addresses itself directly to the audience, a form that emerged in the early 1970s on the tail of the structural film. We have encountered its embryonic manifestation already in Anger's *Invocation of My Demon Brother*.

The single actor of *Blue Moses* hollers to the audience when he first appears from his cave. He is the merchant of metaphysical fear Melville knew as "The Lightning Rod Man." He tries to scare us by proposing to quiet our fears: "Don't be afraid. We're not alone. There's the cameraman . . . or was . . . once." Then in an elliptical way he informs us of what we should be afraid of. He points to mysterious tracks, in a desolate place, left by a man who must have been running. That narrative hint, recurring throughout the film, hovers on the edge of parody of the devices used in novels and films to draw us into illusionism and suspense. In a fugal structure of leap-frogging episodes interrupted by dissolves to the same actor in different costumes, Brakhage lets his actor assume different guises from the history of acting (a classical Greek mask is painted on his face, in robes he strikes "Shakespearean" postures), and his language, usually that of the confidence man, veers to sing-song and melodrama.

The leap-frogging counterpoint of scenes at the beginning of the film is recapitulated in superimposition, both of picture and sound, near the

end. The actor pulls off a false beard and, in a Pirandelloistic cliché, reveals himself to the audience. "Look," he says, "this is ridiculous. I'm an actor. You see what I mean? . . . You're my audience, my captive audience. I'm your entertainment, your player. This whole film is about us." In the course of the speech, the superimposition becomes footage from earlier in the film, projected over his chest. When he turns his back to the projector, the film images cease, and he is framed in a white rectangle of the projector operating without film.

In the middle of his speech in front of the interior film screen he repeats his consolation: "But don't be afraid. There's a film-maker behind *every scene*, in back of every word I speak, behind you, too, so to speak." When the camera suddenly swings around into the darkness, glimpsing the hand signals of the director, he adds, as if a spectator had turned his head to the projection booth: "No. Don't turn around. It's useless." It is at this point that he himself turns toward his screen and the images change to pure white light on his body.

Blue Moses ends as it began with a series of dissolves of the protagonist returning to his cave and gesturing ceremonially. In its form and substance *Blue Moses* attacks the dramatic film as an untenable convention. Brakhage temporarily accepts the principles of the realists of film theory who argue that cinema arises from the interaction of the artist with exterior reality in front of the camera. But he rebuts them with a demonstration of how fragile their sense of exterior reality is. At one point the actor of *Blue Moses* gestures to the sun and cries, "an eclipse," at which point an obvious, messy splice throws the image into blackness, and he adds, "manufactured, but not yet patented, for your pleasure." *Blue Moses* is a negative polemic, an attack on the modified Realism of the European cinema of the early sixties (Godard, Resnais, Fellini, Antonioni, etc.). In its place he proposed the investigation of the consciousness confronting (and constructing) external nature in the form of the lyrical film.[17]

Of the many film-makers of the sixties working in the lyrical mode after Brakhage's initial work, Bruce Baillie has had the surest voice of his own.[18] In his lyrical films, Baillie turns from the uneasy inwardness of Brakhage's work to a problematic study of the heroic. *Mr. Hayashi* (1961), *Have You Thought of Talking to the Director?* (1962), *A Hurrah for Soldiers* (1962–1963), and *To Parsifal* (1963) prepared the ground for his major extended lyrics, *Mass for the Dakota Sioux* (1964) and *Quixote* (1965, revised 1967). The first of these films was made as a newsreel advertisement to be shown at Baillie's film society, Canyon Cinema, in the second year of its existence. It shows a Japanese gardener, Mr. Hayashi, performing his daily tasks in a few black and white shots. The form is intentionally brief, minor, and occasional; although there is no metaphor or conflict of images, it reminds one of the aspiration first voiced by Maya Deren and later echoed by Brakhage to create a cinematic haiku. The plastic and formal tradition indigenous to San Francisco, the center of Baillie's activity, owes something to Eastern and specifically Japanese, aesthetics.

The Asian "saint" in a fusion of Zen, Tao, and Confucian traditions is the first of the heroes proposed by Baillie's cinema. The second, Parsifal, logically prefigures the first; his quest seeks the reconciliation of nature and mind that makes the Asian saint possible.

In *Mass* and *Quixote* he subtly blends glimpses of the *heroic personae* with despairing reflections on violence and ecological disaster. In the earlier films those poles were explored in separate and much weaker works. *Have You Thought of Talking to the Director?* casually articulates an image of sexual loss and paranoia by combining an interview-like monologue about girlfriends in a moving car and on the streets of a small California town with a frame story derived from the *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*; that is, Baillie, repeatedly cuts from the speaker to him sitting silently in the corridor of a hospital, and the sinister doctor who whispers near him appears—no longer as a doctor—at significant points in the events outside the hospital. In *A Hurrah for Soldiers* Baillie naively attempted to illuminate an elliptical and rhythmically edited scene of imagined violence—a man attacked by a gang of women—with photographs of actual violence from newspaper. He is more successful in the mixing of sounds in this film than in the cutting of images. In his major lyrical films he extended his natural talent for sound fusion to a textured visual surface which uses superimposition and often mixtures of negative and positive black-and-white with color, in a rhetoric of slow transformations. His notes for *Mass* give a clear picture of its structure:

> A film Mass, dedicated to that which is vigorous, intelligent, lovely, the-best-in-Man; that which work suggests is nearly dead.
> Brief guide to the structure of the film:
> INTROIT: A long, lightly exposed section composed in the camera.
> KYRIE: A motorcyclist crossing the San Francisco Bay Bridge accompanied by the sound of the Gregorian Chant. The EPISTLE is in several sections. In this central part, the film becomes gradually more outrageous, the material being either television or the movies, photographed directly from the screen. The sounds of the "mass" rise and fall throughout the EPISTLE.
> GLORIA: The sound of a siren and a short sequence with a '33 Cadillac proceeding over the Bay Bridge and disappearing into a tunnel.
>
> The final section of the COMMUNION begins with the OFFERTORY in a procession of lights and figures in the second chant.
>
> The anonymous figure from the introduction is discovered again, dead on the pavement. The touring car arrives, with the celebrants; the body is consecrated and taken away past an indifferent, isolated people accompanied by the final chant.[19]

At the very beginning he shows a man struggling and dying on a city street at night, ignored by passers-by as if he were a drunk collapsed in the street. In the subsequent weaving of moving camera shots, in counterpointed superimpositions of factories, expanses of prefabricated houses, traffic, parades, and markets, all complemented by a soundtrack that blends Gregorian chant with street noises in shifting degrees of priority, the viewer tends to forget the dying man or to see him as the forecast of the section of the film that enjambs bits of war films with advertisements shot directly off a television without kinescopic rectification so that the images continually show bands and jump.

Contrasted to the images of waste and violence, a motorcyclist appears in the traffic and Baillie follows him, shooting from a moving car for a long time. He is the tentative vehicle of the heroic in this film. But when he too disappears in the welter of superimposition, we do not expect his return. Instead the movement shifts to the grill of a 1933 Cadillac as it cruises the highway. As the second part of the film circles back on itself, the Cadillac turns out to be the ambulance/hearse which brings doctors to the man on the street and which carries away his dead body. Then when it reenters the highway, Baillie again shifts the emphasis to the motorcyclist, whose second disappearance concludes the film.

Two images demonstrate the ironic pessimism with which Baillie views the American landscape at the center of the film. Over the sprawl of identical prefabricated houses he prints the words of Black Elk: "Behold, a good nation walking in a sacred manner in a good land!" Then he pans to an American flag waving on a tall pole in the distance. By changing the focus without cutting from the shot, he brings to view a previously unseen barbed wire fence between the camera and the flag. "The Mass is traditionally a celebration of Life," he wrote in the Film-Makers' Cooperative catalogue, "thus the contradiction between the form of the Mass and the theme of Death. The dedication is to the religious people who were destroyed by the civilization which evolved the Mass."

In *To Parsifal* Baillie began to elaborate his equivocal relationship to technology by employing the train both as a symbol of the waste land and the heroic thrust of the Grail quester. The motorcyclist of Mass possesses some of that ambivalence. But it is in *Quixote* that Baillie utilizes the tension between the heroics and the blindness of technology as a generative principle for the organization of the whole film. He told Richard Whitehall:

> *Quixote* was my last western-hero form. I summarized a lot of things. I pretty much emphasized the picture of an American as a conquistador. A conquering man. For example, up in Montana there's a bridge being put up, driving straight through the mountains, and it was half made when I got there.
>
> They're chopping their way right through. And, to me, that was the best explanation of what western man was up to.[20]

In many ways *Quixote* restates the structural principles of *Mass* with increased irony and ambiguity. For instance, the tentative protagonist of the earlier film, the motorcyclist who appears near the beginning and the end, becomes a flying man, a movie version of Superman, at both ends of the later film. Despite his sophistication, Baillie remains an innocent; the whole of his cinema exhibits an alternation between two irreconcilable themes: the sheer beauty of the phenomenal world (few films are as graceful to the eye as his, few are as sure of their colors) and the utter despair of forgotten men. It is in *Quixote* alone that these two themes emerge into a dialectical form, an antithesis of grace and disgrace.

The incessant forward movement of *Mass* leads to the meandering journey, of which *Quixote* is the diary, of a film-maker in search of a hero who can be his mediator without irony. But the series of agents he finds cannot sustain that burden: they are tired Indians in a luncheonette, an old farmer, a prizefighter reduced to Bowery life, a naked woman, the artificial Superman, and even animals (a turtle, horses). In their impotence, the lyrical film-maker, himself a Quixotic observer without Anger's confidence that the cinema is a magical weapon, becomes the hero of his own film as he descends through a nostalgia for the lost Indian civilizations (manifested in the intercutting of contemporary chiefs with turn-of-the-century photographs of the tribes) to a vision of New York streets meshed with a collage of old films and footage of the war in Vietnam.

With Baillie we return to an aspect of the visionary film-maker suspended since our discussion of Maya Deren: his role as a champion of reform for the film-makers' plight. In 1961 he founded Canyon Cinema, the first permanent showcase for the avant-garde film in the San Francisco area since the collapse of Art in Cinema more than a decade earlier. The next year it moved from the town of Canyon, still keeping the name, to Berkeley and initiated a newspaper, *The Canyon Cinema News*. Shortly afterward he founded the Canyon Cinema Cooperative, following the example of Jonas Mekas and the original Film-Makers' Cooperative in New York. Although Baillie soon retried as the chief administrator of the Canyon Cinema functions, they continued much in the spirit in which they were founded. The visionary inspiration which informs the work of the American avant-garde film-maker has in many instances spread to the creation of his institutions.

Stan Brakhage, too, has been influential in the formation and promotion of organizations to benefit the film-maker. He was one of the founding members of Mekas' Cooperative, and in its early years he acted as an informal ambassador, uniting factions in different parts of the country whom he encountered in his lecture tours. One of his major concerns has been the encouragement of private libraries of 8mm and 16mm films. But he has been uncomfortable in his alliances with the community of film-makers and has on several occasions withdrawn his films from cooperatives and attacked them. His motives have been for the most part aesthetic, not economic; and within the politics of aesthetics he has fought,

with all the polemical means at his disposal, tendencies he felt were contrary to the making and reception of films as revelation. Repeatedly he has invoked the myth of Faust in his periodic attacks on other film-makers and ideas, reserving for himself a Prometheanism, wherein the commitment to aesthetic perfection and prophetic revelation triumphs over seduction. His repeated reconciliations with film-makers' institutions are usually attended by confessions that his dramatic response was personally essential to the rooting out of drama from his films. Markopoulos, too, and in spite of his enthusiastic appraisal of the inspired work of the cooperatives, withdrew, returned, and then withdrew his films again without the public histrionics of Brakhage.

But Baillie has eschewed the polemical struggle in the ten years he has been making films. His rare interviews reflect his pacific personality, generosity, and disinterest in theory. A persistent struggle with serious hepatitis since 1967 has circumscribed his activities and generated a meditation on death in his longest film so far, *Quick Billy* (1971), which will be discussed in the next chapter.

In the end, the argument between consciousness and nature is as crucial to Baillie's cinema as it is to Brakhage's. But it is problematic because the weight of the dialogue seems to rest outside of the film, especially in the prolific stream of films from the late sixties—*Tung* (1966), *Castro Street* (1966), *All My Life* (1966), *Still Life* (1966), and *Valentin de las Sierras* (1967). In these, the eye of the film-maker quiets his mind with images of reconciliation; the dialectics of cinematic thought become calm in the filming of the privileged moment of reconciliation. In an interview with Richard Corliss, he describes his achievement as a film-maker and the fundamental shortcoming of that achievement:

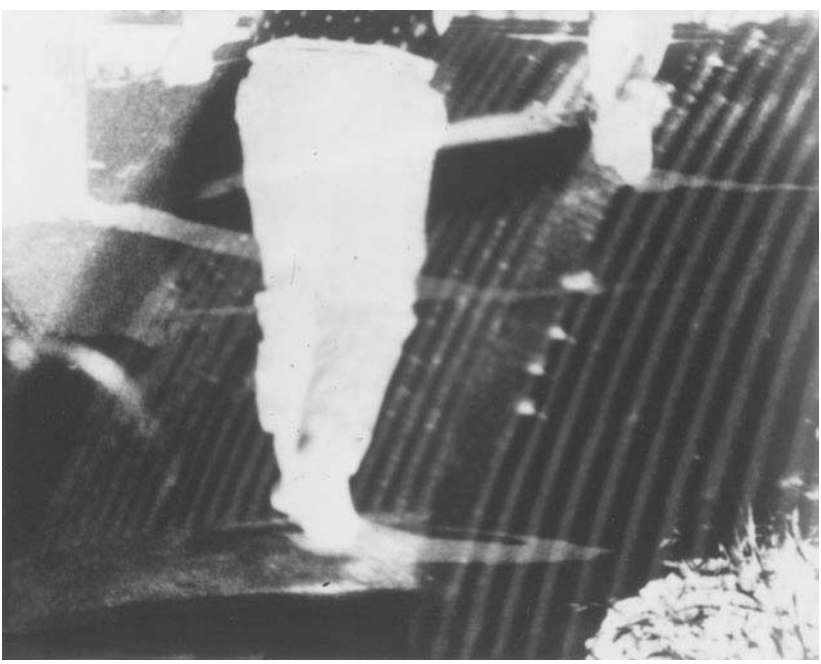
> Now, I can answer a little bit just for myself, as having been a film artist. I always felt that I brought as much truth out of the environment as I could, but I'm tired of coming *out of*. . . . I want everybody really lost, and I want us all to be at home there. Something like that. Actually I am not interested in that, but I mean that's what you could do. Lots of people would like it. I have to say finally what I *am* interested in, like Socrates: peace . . . rest . . . nothing.[21]

Baillie's two versions of the structural film, coinciding with the general emergence of that form, draw upon his lyrical films and point toward the consecration of the privileged moment. By replacing a form which has internal evolution with a monomorphic shape and by affirming the priority of the mechanics of the tools over the eye of the film-maker, the structural film terminates the dialectics of the lyrical and mythopoeic forms. Baillie comes to it in the apparent hope of subduing the reflective ego and, at least tentatively, exploring deep space and unquestioned natural objects. In *All My Life* (1966) he pans along a fence lined with rose bushes. Then

in the same slow movement of the unstopping camera, he switches from the horizontal to the vertical, rising above the fence into the sky, resting in a composition of two telephone lines trisecting the blue field. The movement lasts as long as it takes Ella Fitzgerald to sing "All My Life" on the soundtrack.[22] Its complement, *Still Life* (1966), fixes an interior view with an unmoving camera. The voices on its soundtrack suggest that the dim figures by the far window are looking at a series of photographs of shrines devoted to Ramakrishna. Baillie refers to this in the Film-Makers' Cooperative catalogue as "A film on efforts toward a new American religion."

Castro Street returns to the lyrical form with a renewed lushness of texture and color. His note for it is typically gnomic and tantalizing in its guarded hints about his working process:

> Inspired by a lesson from Erik Satie; a film in the form of a street—Castro Street running by the Standard Oil Refinery in Richmond, California . . . switch engines on one side and refinery tanks, stacks and buildings on the other—the street and film, ending at a red lumber company. All visual and sound elements from the street, progressing from the beginning to the end of the street, one side is black-and-white (secondary), and one side is color—like male and female elements. The emergence of a long



Bruce Baillie's *Castro Street*: "the image of *Consciousness*."

> switch-engine shot (black-and-white solo) is to the film-maker the essential of *consciousness*.[23]

A different note subtitles it "The Coming of Consciousness."

The film begins slowly and gradually changes pace several times. Its fusion of black-and-white negative with color, often moving in opposite directions, recalls Brakhage's micro-rhythms. The superimposition tends to destroy depth and to reduce foreground and background to two hovering planes, one slightly in front of the other. The opening movement, accompanied by the sound of a train in slow motion, occurs on the back plane. An iris isolates a smokestack, then slowly wanders on the screen, drifting toward the upper right corner. The first dynamic image is of a negative, high-contrast power line moving in the superimposition.

Baillie occasionally uses slightly distorted images of the trains and the railroad yard with prismatic colors around the border of distinct shapes. He also uses images which were recorded by an improperly threaded camera so that they appear to jump or waver up and down on the screen. A ghost image of a man and the numbers from the side of a boxcar jump in this way on the foreground layer early in the film. Soon afterward part of the screen clears to show a red filament inside a tube; for Baillie not only uses superimpositions but soft masking devices so that parts of the screen will be single-layered, while the rest is double, or will contain a third element which appears on neither one of the superimposition layers, as if melted into the picture.

As the trains move faster, the pace of the film changes. The smokestack in the iris returns, now red-filtered and occupying the center of the screen. Another central iris replaces it, looking out on violets in a yellow field; slowly an old Southern Pacific engine pulls into the iris beyond the violets, recalling the later movements of *To Parsifal*. A yellow car crosses almost pure white negative cars.

At this point in the film we hear whistles, muted voices, and the tinkling of a piano. A curtain is drawn open to show the blue of the sky, and then it closes, blending immediately into the superimpositions, which become progressively anamorphic. To the sound of clangs, negative and color trains move in opposite directions across the screen, ending in the dominance of a silhouetted negative engine with a man in it, slowly crossing the field of vision. This is the image Baillie refers to as the "essential of consciousness."

Just before the film ends another negative figure takes over the film. The camera follows the blazing white pants of a walking workman, then shows his polka-dot shirt. His appearance crowns the passing negative of the engine and its conductor. Then a red, dome-like barn appears while a sign, saying "Castro Street," pointing in the direction opposite to that of the camera, marks the film's conclusion.

Both Brakhage and Baillie push in their later lyrical films toward cinematic visions of impersonal or unqualified consciousness. In films such as *Pasht, Fire of Waters*, and *Castro Street* they succeed in momentarily disengaging the self from vision. But that came only after they had invented and pursued a form that could articulate that complex relation for the first time in cinema.

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seven

Major Mythopoeia

AMONG THE HIGHEST achievements of Brakhage's art since the spectacular series of lyrical films in the late 1950s and early 1960s have been three long or serial films, *Dog Star Man* (or in its expanded form, *The Art of Vision*), *Songs*, and *Scenes from Under Childhood* (itself the first part of a projected autobiography, *The Book of the Film*). Likewise Baillie had proceeded from lyric to epic with the making of *Quick Billy*, which holds a position in the evolution of his work comparable to that of *Dog Star Man* in Brakhage's.

The writing of *Metaphors on Vision* coincided with the shooting and editing of most of *Dog Star Man*. Brakhage seems to have started both around 1960. The book was published at the very beginning of 1964; the five-part film was completed by the end of that year and had its first screenings in 1965. Here more than at any other point in Brakhage's career his aesthetics throw light on the film. Nevertheless the critic must be careful not to let the film-maker's glosses completely dominate his viewing of the film. An over-

subscription to Brakhage's paraphrases has blinded at least two published interpretations of the film to some of its complications.[1]

Dog Star Man elaborates in mythic, almost systematic terms, the worldview of the lyrical films. More than any other work of the American avant-garde film, it stations itself within the rhetoric of Romanticism, describing the birth of consciousness, the cycle of the seasons, man's struggle with nature, and sexual balance in the visual evocation of a fallen titan bearing the cosmic name of the Dog Star Man.

From two interviews, one published as the introduction to *Metaphors on Vision* and another unpublished one now in the Anthology Film Archives library, we can construct his argument for *Dog Star Man:*

> The man climbs the mountain out of winter and night into the dawn, up through spring and early morning to midsummer and high noon, to where he chops down the tree. . . . There's a Fall—and the fall back to somewhere, midwinter.
>
> I thought of *Dog Star Man* as seasonally structured that way; but also while it encompasses a year and the history of man in terms of image material (e.g. trees become architecture for a whole history of religious monuments or violence becomes the development of war), I thought it should be contained within a single day.
>
> I wanted *Prelude* to be a created dream for the work that follows rather than Surrealism which takes its inspiration from dream; I stayed close to the practical use of dream material. . . . One thing I knew for sure (from my own dreaming) was that what one dreams just before waking structures the following day. . . . Since *Prelude* was based on dream vision as I remembered it, it had to include "closed-eye vision."
>
> In the tradition of Ezra Pound's *Vorticism, Part One* is a *Noh* drama, the exploration in minute detail of a single action and all its ramifications. [Brakhage described the basic action of this section as "the two steps forward, one step backward" motion of the hero, which he related to the forward-backward motion of blood in the capillary system, the final image of that part.]
>
> The heart had stopped in *Part One*, and, while we see an increasingly black and white image [of the man] that climbs up the mountain, there is a negative image of the Dog Star Man that is absolutely fallen at that instant.
>
> I had no idea what would happen in *Part Two*, except that it would be in some sense autobiographical; but I knew that the heart must start again in *Part Three;* and that it would be a sexual daydream, or that level of yearning, that would start the heart again.

The moment at which the man is seen both climbing and fallen is recapitulated in a way at the beginning of *Part Two*. . . . I reintroduced the man climbing both in negative and positive, superimposed. I had some sense that these twin aspects of the Dog Star Man could be moving as if in memory. . . . I realized that the man, in his fall and his climb in negative and positive, was split asunder and related either to himself as baby (those first six weeks . . . in which a baby's face goes through a transition from that period we call infancy to babyhood; . . . the lines of the face fill out what might be called a first mask or a personality, a cohesiveness which occurs in the facial structure or control of the face over those first six weeks) and/or to his child.

The whole idea of the baby's face achieving a solidity, or the first period of birth would relate metaphorically to spring, the springing into *per-son*. . . . At the end of *Part Two* a balance is achieved when the images return to the Dog Star Man in his fall. It was very important to me, too, that the tripod legs would show in the distance so that there is always some sense that this is a film-maker being filmed. . . . In no sense is it engaging or pulling in, precisely because in the plot level of the film the Dog Star Man is being engaged with his own childhood by his child. . . .

The images return to the Dog Star Man in his fall, in his jumps back down the earth, or his imagined fall. He's seen finally flat on his back on a rock ledge and the figure of the woman is collaged in.

Part Three has a "His, Her, and Heart" roll. . . . Female images are trying to become male and have not succeeded and the males are trying to become female and have not succeeded. . . . In the "Her" roll you see mounds of moving flesh that separate distinguishably into a woman's image, but then become very tortured by attempts to transform into male. It's very Breugelesque in a way; penises replace breast in flashes of images; then a penis will jut through the eyes; or male hair will suddenly move across the whole scape of the female body. . . . At some point this ceases and this flesh becomes definitely woman. Then on the "His" roll . . . you have the opposite occurring: a male mound of flesh which keeps being tortured by a proclivity to female imagery; so that, for instance, the lips are suddenly transformed into a vagina. Finally the male form becomes distinct. Then, of course, these two dance together as they are superimposed on each other; you get this mound of male-female flesh which pulls apart variously and superimposes upon itself in these mixtures of Breugelesque discoveries, so to speak, or distortions. Finally

> toward the end, the male and female become separate so that they can come together.
>
> *Part Four* begins with that man on the ledge as we found him at the end of *Part Two*. He rises up and shakes off the sexual daydream and becomes involved in shaking off every reason he might have for chopping that tree. . . . Finally, if looked at carefully; there is really no relevant, definite, specific reason given for that Dog Star Man to chop the tree as he does at the end of *Part Four*. . . . Finally the whole concept of the woodcutter gets tossed into the sky. . . . The axe is lifted up and the figure cuts to Cassiopeia's chair, which I suppose you can say is finally what Dog Star Man sits down into in the sky. . . . The whole film flares out in obvious cuts which relate in their burning out and changes of subtly colored leader to the beginning of the *Prelude*.

Brakhage's paraphrase suggests at times a narrative consistency which is not apparent in the film, while he omits other obvious connections. *Part One* clearly situates itself in winter, while *Part Four* begins with images of summer and proceeds along an alternation between summer and winter until its end. The seasonal system, as Brakhage outlines it, refers to the dominant metaphors of the parts, not to their total visual presences. In *Part Two* we see the visual, aural, and haptic reactions of an infant (the mediator of spring) and in *Part Three* the superimposition of naked male and female bodies with a beating heart and paint splatter. *Part Three* is an erotic version of the myth of summer's richness. Finally, in *Part Four*, the images of the protagonist literally falling from summer work to winter desolation elliptically suggest the transitional season of fall and mimetically echo its processes.

Yet more striking than the problem created by Brakhage's claims for the seasonal interpretation of the film is the difference between the actual function of *Parts Two* and *Three* in the film and in the film-maker's account of them. It is true that the heart slows down at the end of *Part One* (but it does not stop) and that it accelerates at the conclusion of *Part Three*. Yet the fallen Dog Star Man of *Part One* appears vigorously climbing upward again at the beginning of *Part Two*, and he is seen both climbing down and fallen at the end of that section. In fact, the opening and concluding climbs distinctly bracket the entire episode of the infant's sensibilities. Brakhage's reading of the film fails to account for this and substitutes in its place a much more obscure connection, that of the heart rates. Actually, *Part Two* and *Three* have a dialectical relationship to each other. They are alternatives or aspects of the divided titan. He postulates two forms of privileged vision, the innocent and the orgasmic. In the earlier films, as we have seen, Brakhage describes the urgency of the need for unschooled vision and for erotic fulfillment, although not in a single film. In *Loving* there is a hint that the former can be born of the latter. With

the idealization of the infantile and the orgasmic vision goes a severe skepticism about their adequacy.

It is at this point that Brakhage's perspective most closely coincides with Blake's, who at various moments in his development speaks of four realms or states of existence. The first, Beulah, or Innocence, encompasses the vision of the child; next Generation, or Experience, defines the adult world of titanic sexual frustration and circumscribed erotic fulfillment; only the minor appendages, the sexual organs, can unite in Blake's derisive vision, while the whole body cries out for a merging of male and female. Northrop Frye describes one relation of Innocence to Experience thus: "As the child grows up, his conscious mind accepts 'experience,' or reality without any human shape or meaning, and his childhood innocent vision, having nowhere else to go, is driven underground into what we should call the subconscious, where it takes an essentially sexual form."[2] The third and fourth states are respectively the damned and liberated alternatives to the two-fold opposition of innocence and experience. They are Ulro, the hell of rationalism, self-absorption, and the domination of nature; and Eden, the redeemed unity realm of "The Real Man, the Imagination."

The image of the child is complex in Brakhage's films.[3] In *Anticipation of the Night* it evokes innocence lost, and the whole film alternates between the minor pastoral and the major elegiac. But *Dog Star Man* aspires to the more elaborate mentality of *Metaphors on Vision*, in which the child can be a guide, or a warning, but not an end. On the first page he writes:

> Once vision may have been given—that which seems inherent in the infant's eye, an eye which reflects the loss of innocence more eloquently than any other human feature, an eye which soon learns to classify sights, an eye which mirrors the movement of the individual toward death by its increasing inability to see.
>
> But one can never go back, not even in imagination. After the loss of innocence only the ultimate of knowledge can balance the wobbling pivot.[4]

Behind the puns, name-dropping, and quotations of "Margin Alien" rests the idea of an anagogic unity of literary and painterly imagery. In his writing and speaking about *Dog Star Man* there is a tension between the argument of the film as he conceived it before shooting, while making it, or after it was finished, and the aspects of the film which were revealed to him at any of these stages. That the outline changed during the seven years between its inception and completion he makes quite clear:

> I always kept the growth of *Dog Star Man* consonant with the changes in our living. I never let an idea impose itself to the expense of actually being where I was when I was working on the film. I never built, or permitted any ivory tower to get built

> around myself so that I could pursue the original idea of *Dog Star Man* to the expense of keeping that work from changing in detail according to the life we were living.[5]

The dialectic between the clarity of design and the vicissitudes of the film-making process accounts, in part, for the fact that someone as articulate and insightful as Brakhage could be blind to the way in which *Part Two* and *Part Three* of his film function as paired interludes in the texture of the work. In these two sections of almost equal length, which are visually distinct from the unity of *Prelude, Part One,* and *Part Four* (and different from each other), Brakhage, like Blake, describes the sources of renewal as an innocence of the senses and erotic union, and, again like Blake, suggests that alone each is insufficient and that together they open the still very difficult possibility of physical and spiritual resurrection.

The film is quite specific about that difficulty. After the interludes of *Parts Two* and *Three, Part Four*, which rushes to its conclusion in five minutes of very rapid montage on four layers of film, begins with the fallen figure and shows him alternately chopping the tree in the heat of the summer sun and wandering, stunned from his fall, through the winter forest of *Part One*. The resolution of the film is *not* a Blakean liberation into Eden and reunion of the imaginative and physical division. Brakhage at this point follows the post-Romantic substitution of tautology for liberation: in their major poems, "Un Coup de Dés" and "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction," Mallarmé and Stevens triumphantly proclaim the failure of the divine within or without man; instead they posit a teleology of poetry, and in their wake Brakhage ends his film with a naked affirmation of his materials and his mechanics. The images dissolve in projected light; the chopping of the tree becomes a metaphor for the splicing of film. The apotheosis which Brakhage describes (Dog Star Man assuming Cassiopeia's throne in the sky) appears but for a second on the screen and it is not the last image of that figure. We see him furiously chopping again, which qualifies the stellar image into an idea, a possibility, or a desire.

Prelude begins with a greenish-gray leader in which faint, shallow, shimmering changes of texture gradually appear. Out of this abstract chaos images of the sky, snow, fire, and streetlights emerge, sometimes slowly and sometimes suddenly. As the eye is teased by the speed and shifting focus of these initial elements, it becomes apparent that the montage is in the service of a double metaphor; the opening of the film seems like both the birth of the universe and the formation of the individual consciousness.

The entire film is formed of two superimposed layers of images, but at times, such as at the very beginning, there are visual silences on one or both layers which either allow one image to assume the presence it would on unsuperimposed film or present a vaguely lit visual field on the screen. For the most part the superimposition reinforces the basic flatness of the images in the *Prelude*; compositions-in-depth are extremely rare; and often

Brakhage uses filters, distorting lenses, and a moving camera to create a two-dimensional space for his images. Finally there are numerous instances of painting or scratching over one or both layers, making the superimposition virtually three- or four-fold.

Early in the film, shots of the bearded, long-haired Dog Star Man are glimpsed, along with fragmentary pictures of his dog and the moon. Both by superimposition and by montage Brakhage compares the movement of clouds with the flow of the blood in magnification. From this point on, a rhetoric of metaphor is established, mixing micro-and macro-cosmic images with varying degrees of explicitness.

In the first third of the film, after the initial movement of the consciousness in which images become more concrete and steadier on the screen, an evolving sequence concentrates on shots of the moon through a telescope and coronas of the sun, while the figures of the Dog Star Man and the woman are introduced as a theme of the development.

The forms of superimposition are numerous: explicit illusionism (the moon moving through the Dog Star Man's head); reduplication; conflicts of scale (the sun's corona over a lonely tree); conflicts of depth (the mask-like face of the hero over a deep image of a city street at night); color over black-and-white (bluish waves on the white moon); one distinct and one blurred figure; finally, the superimposition can recur synchronously, two images at a time, or, as is more usual, the alternations may be staggered, eliding the changes.

Following the sun and moon sequence with its simultaneous introduction of the male and female figures, the images settle on earthly subjects. The mountains and a solitary house appear. In this central scene we see much more of the Dog Star Man himself. After an interlude of unraveling landscapes with expositions of internal organs, especially the heart, comes the most concentrated episode in the film: here we see the Dog Star Man struggling with the tree—the central act of the film according to the film-maker's argument. Significantly, this is the one important episode which occurs only in the *Prelude*. For the rest of the film, that moment of confrontation, hinted at here, is the central absent vortex around which the actions revolve. Actually Brakhage himself had not known that the struggle with the tree would occur only in the *Prelude*, even after he finished that section in 1961. At that time he was talking as if it would be elaborated in the summer vision of *Part Three*, which he had not yet begun to structure.

As we watch the film the tree episode suddenly appears to crystallize within seconds, both layers seemingly devoted to its exposition. While he shakes the tree as if uprooting it, the camera zooms in again and again on the roots, comparing them once to a female crotch, and the immediately subsequent chopping of the tree repeats the rhythm of the zoom. Almost as suddenly as the scene materialized, it dissolves, and the idea of a family emerges, with shots of the Dog Star Man holding a baby and kissing the woman, and of her breast-feeding the baby.

In its final third, *Prelude* re-establishes its emphasis first on the sun, now seen with a tremendous eruption of surface scratches, imitating the flares; then the landscape variations reaffirm their presence, including now for the first time a burned forest with Greek columns superimposed (explicitly postulating the origin of that architectural development). Unlike most Brakhage films, including the other sections of *Dog Star Man, Prelude* has neither a climactic nor a *diminuendo* ending. The suddenness of the termination may be a concession to the structure of dreams that Brakhage says inspired the form of this film.

He has described how, after he shot what he thought would be all the material for the whole film, he did not know where to begin editing. He therefore pulled material willy-nilly from the unorganized rushes and edited thirty minutes by chance operations. Looking at this random film, Brakhage had a new insight into the material. He then consciously edited a parallel strip of film in relation to the original chance roll, as if commenting on it. When at times that method failed to produce a coherent vision, he re-edited a section of the randomly composed roll. Knowing this method, we better understand how the film moves in waves from closely knit forms to vague ones. The opening and the tree section seem to have been deliberately structured on both levels. The rising and falling of rhythms and clustering and dissolving of scenes must, then, be a function of the tension between the chance and conscious layers of the film.

Although the images of *Part One* proceed from *Prelude*, that section is formally antithetical to its predecessor. In *Prelude* Brakhage built a pyrotechnic, split-second montage with as much varied material as he could force into half an hour. *Part One* is a *tour de force* of thematically constructed material stretched out to occupy the same amount of screen time. The film organizes itself, not around a nonstop series of metaphors and transformations, but in a number of more or less distinct paragraphs (more distinct at the beginning and end, less so in the center) punctuated by an unusual number of faces for Brakhage.

Ezra Pound, in his book *Gaudier-Brzeska*, which Brakhage read and identified as a primal source for this part, wrote:

> The image is not an idea. It is a radiant node or cluster; it is what I can, and must perforce, call a VORTEX, from which and through which, and into which ideas are constantly rushing.[6]
>
> I am often asked whether there can be a long imagist or vorticist poem. The Japanese, who evolved the *hokku*, evolved also the *Noh* plays. In the best *Noh* the whole play may consist of one image. I mean it is gathered about one image. Its unity consists in one image, enforced by movement and music.[7]

The opening "paragraph" of images seems to both encapsulate and reorganize the cosmology of *Prelude*: the first ten shots, generally much longer than any in the former section, gradually define a particular point

on the earth's surface from the stellar perspective. Three long shots of the moon partially obscured by moving clouds open the film. Then two shots of clouds alone gradually reveal earthly mountains. Continuing the rhythm but not the logic of the sequence, a white flame retreats into a burning log, followed by a flash of whiteness, and then by a very slow shot of frost disintegrating on a window pane into the shape of a hill or mountain as the image fades out. Finally a pulsating corona of the sun shimmers with explosions and issues a climactic burst. A very brief flash of clear leader punctuates the transition to the next paragraph.

The effect of the opening is to move from a position beyond the earth to a specific terrestrial location and then further to a synecdochic evocation of a dwelling (the window), which is also a metaphor for the hilly terrain; then back out, even further than the starting point, beyond the moon to the sun. Visually, the transitions are all consistent and smooth; colors when they appear at all are washed out or subdued. Finally, the entire texture of imagery familiar from the *Prelude* has a new presence and grandeur because of its lack of superimposition—there is virtually none in *Part One*—and the slowness of the montage.

The next grouping of eight shots introduces the Dog Star Man and the central action of the section: his arduous climb up a snow-covered mountain. For the first time in *Dog Star Man* the camera is so placed as to articulate a depth on the screen. The protagonist climbs up along a slanted plane or moves diagonally upward across the screen against a background of distant trees and mountains. Again Brakhage's mention of Gaudier-Brzeska proves a useful clue: his manifesto, *Vortex*, quoted in Pound's book, begins with "Sculptural energy is the mountain."[8]

Nowhere else in all of Brakhage's cinema is the antagonism of consciousness to nature so naked as in *Part One*. The mediator of this agon, the Dog Star Man, seems through most of the film to be defeated by the cold, the slope, and the tangles of trees in his way. Yet as the film progresses, the formal mechanics by which the myth is rendered come more and more to invade the metaphysics of the myth. First, without breaking the rhythm of the slow fades, the film-maker introduces a shot of the hero in greenish negative tossing as if in sleep, suggesting in a most tentative way that the climb itself might be a dream.

The sleeper fades into the arc of the moon, which in turn fades into the first section in which subjective camera positions occur, as if through the eyes of the climber in his struggle. Now hand-held shots of the sun, rushing water, and his hand gripping the snow as he slips are mixed with the filtered objective shots of him inching his way up the mountain. Amid pans of the landscape and blurs which begin to disrupt the even tempo of the opening topology appear images of blood, tissues, and internal organs—an exposition of what is inside the Dog Star Man.

As more and more impressionistic camera work is used, Brakhage achieves a uniquely cinematic tension. There is a dual realization that a particular shot is meant to suggest the Dog Star Man's state of mind or

what he is seeing, and that the same shot is a camera trick. For instance, he sees mountains writhing against the sky. That effect is rendered by the flagrantly obvious twisting of an anamorphic lens.[9] The paradoxical tension between mechanics and illusion is integral to the structure of the section and increases both in the rapidity of instances and the degree of obviousness as the film draws to its conclusion.

The merging of perspectives and the acceleration of metaphor attend a flattening of the depth of the images and a general abstraction of all that we have seen so far. Pound defined Vorticism as follows:

> Every concept, every emotion presents itself to the vivid consciousness in some primary form. It belongs to the art of that form. . . . It is no more ridiculous that a person should receive or convey an emotion by an arrangement of shapes, or planes, or colours, than that they should receive or convey such emotion by an arrangement of music notes.[10]

He is approaching the concept of vortex as "the point of maximum energy. . . . There is a point at which an artistic impulse is visceral and abstract and can be realized in any of the arts."

The development gradually glides into the finale through a meditation on snow: the falling snow becomes the smoke of a forest fire; the hero shakes snow off branches as he clears his way with his axe; there is a single-frame animation of magnified snow crystals. As this section blends into the finale, the precision of the opening groupings returns. There are six separate phrasings of images in the finale of *Part One*. The first begins with the protagonist climbing up a slight incline with the dog moving easily by his side. As the finale progresses, the man seems to move more and more slowly. Appropriately, by the end he has almost stopped. He climbs from the other side of the screen at the same incline and then falls.

The second phrase is only two shots: the Dog Star Man climbing at a forty-five-degree angle, and a subjective shot of him falling. Then whiteness. The next section is again at a forty-five-degree angle; he falls. But the shot is cut short just as his dog begins to move in slow motion.

The fourth paragraph is the most crucial in the finale. He makes his way up a sixty-degree incline. The angle is so steep it poses the question, is the mountain just the function of a tilted camera? The next shot, a seventy-degree angle, answers affirmatively; for the dog, with magnificent grace, easily glides up to his master's side, either defying gravity or demonstrating the tilt. At this point the terms of the opposition of nature and consciousness have been reversed. Although he is still defeated, the Dog Star Man is less the victim of nature than of his own or the film-maker's imagination. In the fifth grouping, he is lying in the snow, first in positive, then in negative. He pulls himself up a ninety-degree cliff as Deren had pulled herself from the bench to a table in *At Land*. Having admitted the camera trick with the dog's leap, Brakhage triumphantly exaggerates it.

Throughout the film, images of the protagonist's interior (heart, blood, tissues) and postulations of his "negative" self have become progressively more frequent and important. The final shot confirms the shift to an interior view: after a very long period of whiteness, the sixth phrase, a single shot, appears. It is a microscopic view of blood in a capillary vessel with its natural long push forward, short push back, long push forward motion.

Coming at this point the final shot illustrates the principle Brakhage derived from his study of idiotoxic disorders: that there is a physiological basis for a nexus of imaginative acts. Thus the rhythm of the blood corresponds to the winter rhythm of the Dog Star Man's struggle with nature.

In *Part Two*, at first he climbs downward away from the camera, then suddenly forward, up and beyond the camera. After the momentary introduction of the crying baby, he appears again, now in color, stumbling among mountainous rocks. As he gropes past one of them, the camera settles upon it. The surface of the rock becomes the first major element of the superimposition upon the baby. Texturally, the images of the baby are not like anything we have seen so far in this film. Brakhage originally intended to make a short film called *Meat Jewel* about the changes of expression in the face of his first son during the initial six weeks of his life. He employed the technique of *Mothlight* in constructing this film—that is, he punched holes in the images and carefully inlaid other film material, holding the mosaic together with a covering of mylar tape. As the child screams in black-and-white, the mouth cavity is replaced by fragments of colored film. At another point, his sense of hearing is emphasized by the insertion of a colored ear in the hole made by cutting out the black-and-white original.

The inspiration of this short film, which became fully incorporated into *Dog Star Man*, had been the film-maker's meticulous observation of the changes in facial structure of his first three children, all girls, and a poem, "The Human Face," by his friend Michael McClure, from which the working title was derived.

Brakhage zooms in repeatedly on the screaming infant as if moving the camera in sympathy with his cries. Later he concentrates on his blinking eyes and the twitching muscles of his face. As a development of this instance, he inlays the colored ear. Lastly, he watches the spasmodic movements of the feet and hands. The effect of these scenes is to present a catalogue of the senses: the birth of sight, of hearing, and the haptic complex evoked by the kicking feet and waving fists.

Superimposed upon the collaged images of the baby are a series of flat colored images, reminiscent of parts of *Prelude*, passing very quickly. The predominant object is the rock mentioned above. It is presented in a flickering light which emphasizes its porous texture and suggests the kind of pre-verbal cognition possible to the newborn child. Compared to the rock are the visual textures of light passing through trees, the sun seen through a gauze, rushing blood, and the flesh of a nipple. A striking metaphor

occurs in the superimposition when the dripping milk from that nipple seems to be a tear in the baby's eye.

The end recalls the beginning, with superimposed solarized scenes of the hero climbing and colored shots of him fallen. As he lies on the ledge, a yellow, filtered shot of the nude woman is collaged over him, as if she were an emanation. The ragged edge of the inlaid material which is superimposed over him on the matching layer connotes the privileged status of the female aspect of his self—or his Emanation in Blakean terms—while at the same time reaffirming the illusory nature of the cinematic material.

The solid-color nude figure is familiar from the *Prelude*, but it is actually with *Part Three* that we associate these images; for that section, the most visually unique of the film, is composed entirely of colored nude images of parts of the male and female body superimposed over each other, while a heart and hand-painted smears (predominantly blue, green, and red) are superimposed over both. The combined effect is of a hermaphroditic sensuousness, rhythmically punctuated by the accelerated splashes of paint and beats of the heart. As the section moves to its end, the bodies become more abstract, as if the camera were very close to the flesh. The color changes become less intense, and thereby the presence of the heart, which had been minor at the opening, comes to predominate.

Here Brakhage's interpretative description of the film fails to illuminate what we see. The synchronous superimposition blurs any distinction between "a male level becoming female" and "a female level becoming male." We see, all at once, a thick interweaving of male and female bodies, and that's all. The occasional appearance of a hand fingering the penis fails to qualify the whole episode as a mediator's "sexual daydream" with any of the precision with which the first three sections were mediated.

After the alternative interludes of *Parts Two* and *Three, Part Four* recommences from the action of the frames of *Part One* and *Part Two*. This is the shortest (five minutes), most intricate, and most elliptical of the sections. The four layers of imagery provide an exceptionally dense viewing experience and make it difficult for the analyst to describe the film. Nevertheless Brakhage has often reduplicated his images two- and threefold, creating an echo or fugue-like effect, in which one act repeats itself in different colors and at slightly asynchronic intervals.

The film opens with several images, one on top of the other, of the Dog Star Man slowly rising from the supine position he was left in at the end of *Part Two*. Horizontal anamorphosis accentuates his outstretched body. His gestures, on the different levels, suggest both that he has risen from the dead and that he has awakened from a night's sleep. While he is still rising on some of the echoing layers, we see the first of many shots of him chopping the felled tree. This is clearly a midsummer image, as he perspires, wipes his forehead, and continues his vigorous chopping in the noon sun. The montage reinforces the notion of resurrection. As the film progresses the gesture of chopping will assume a series of different overtones. In fact, the core of *Part Four* is the transformation of associations

we have acquired in the first seventy minutes of the film, through unanticipated juxtapositions and superimpositions.

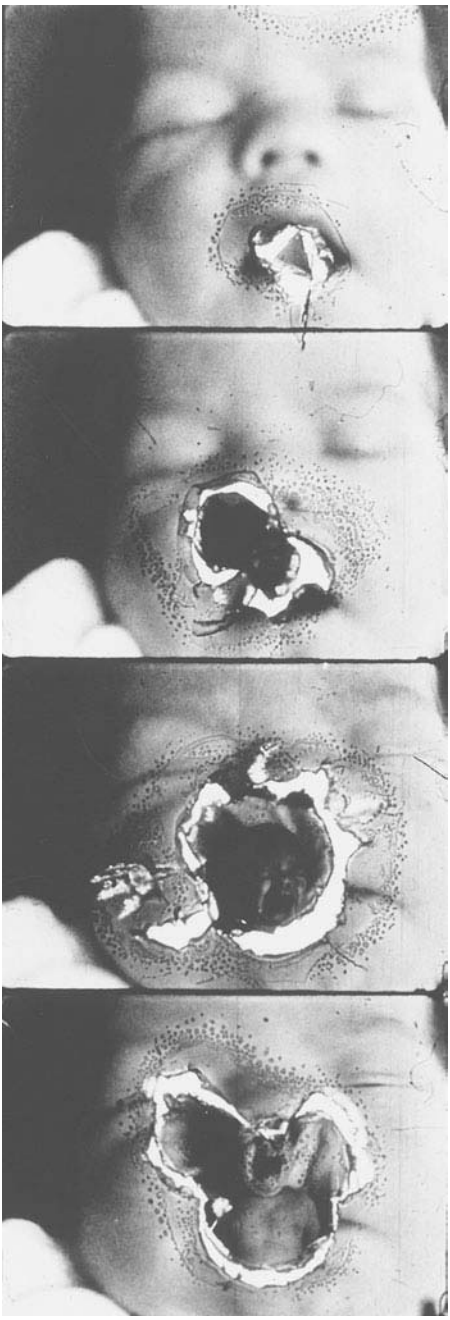
One of the major motifs of *Part Three* is a deep red shot of the full female figure, lying down and rising in one continuous movement. Brakhage triple-exposed this movement in the camera so that it appears on one layer of film. The woman seems to be rising out of herself in the composite. This shot had appeared proleptically in the *Prelude* and plays a significant role in the structure of *Part Three*. In its first appearance in *Part Four*, it reflects the rise of the hero, a sympathetic movement on the part of his female emanation; at the same time it introduces a very quick synecdochic narrative of lovemaking, conception, birth, and child-raising. The second figure in this sequence, a black-and-white image of bodies making love, also appeared in *Part One*, where it stood out as a rupture in the logic of the woodman's drama. There I called attention to an unexplained image of childbirth. In *Part Four* the birth scene, like the brief shots of the red-tinted woman, the genitalia, and the lovemaking, is presented very quickly and schematically, condensing the erotic and procreative cycle into a few seconds, but the visual echoes and metaphors make it perfectly clear what we are seeing. The occurrence of the shot of the Dog Star Man chopping wood early in this narrative renders that gesture a metaphor for lovemaking. Then a dynamic eruption of a solar corona, covered with emulsion scratches at the moment of the flame burst, symbolizes the orgasm. The whole movement from arousal, through copulation, labor, and birth to shots of breast-feeding and the dripping nipple which we recognize from *Parts Two* and *Three* takes less than a minute.

The narrative of the child continues after a lacuna in which the emphasis changes from sex and birth to topology. From an airplane we look down on mountain peaks, while in superimposition the camera zooms in on a house. The elaboration of this movement from a panorama of mountains down to the isolated house gives rise to the most dramatic play of depth and flatness in the entire film.

Originally the topological section of the film had been shot for a separate work, which like *Meat Jewel* was integrated into *Dog Star Man* and never completed in itself. This time another poet, Robert Kelly, had inspired Brakhage to make a landscape film by his use of the neologism "landshape." Its amalgamation into *Part Four* is yet another instance of Brakhage's proclaimed willingness to allow his film to develop as he edits it.

During the zooming movements on the house, flames appear in brief flashes, superimposed. Their locus becomes fixed in the family hearth as the virtual line from mountain to house extends inside, where we see the child, now several months old, crawling before a fireplace.

The crawling baby continues the haptic exploration of space initiated in the cradle of *Part Two*, while in superimposition the theme of the mountain develops. A third element in the combination, the protagonist on the mountain, once again compared to the baby as he feels his way around, sets up a metaphorical transformation: the fire before the baby evokes the



Stan Brakhage's *Dog Star Man: Part Two*: collage of the infant's scream.

corona of the sun, which in turn introduces a shot of the Dog Star Man looking up to the sun. He seems once again defeated, overpowered by the natural. He puts down his axe, and amid flashes of branches, the baby, flames, the corona, and white leader, he falls backward in slow motion down the mountain.

Again the film-maker introduces the triple exposure in red of the settling and rising female nude, now in ironic analogy to the falling hero. Then a sunset announces the time of the fall.

At this point the film tantalizes us with a premature movement toward a conclusion. The images dissolve in whiteness. But after a long pause they reappear, now in winter with the bruised and stunned hero on his knees in pain and groping through the snowy forest. As night comes on and stars begin to move quickly across the sky, the summer mid-day images of the titan chopping the tree suddenly return and take over the film until its end. As he chops there is a brief transition to negative, superimposed over moving stars, which in the film-maker's synopsis is the crucial moment of the conclusion. Within the rhythm of the film the negative image seems more a contingency than a true apotheosis, for the chopping continues after it in color. Intercut and superimposed with the regular gestures of the woodman appear splice marks, flares of film stock, and sprocket holes. In its final manifestation this often repeated image becomes a metaphor for the film-cutter. With the establishment of this connection the film evaporates in flares and leader.

In *The Art of Vision*, Brakhage presents all the layers of film which went into the making of *Dog Star Man*, individually and in superimposed combinations. The following schema shows the order of the film. The layers of a given section are identified by letters, so that, for instance, first the A layer of *Prelude* is seen, then the B layer, then the two together or the actual *Prelude* as it appears in *Dog Star Man*. Thus all of the shorter film is enclosed within the longer. In outline the form is:

Prelude	A	25 min.	
	B	25 min.	
	AB	25 min.	
Part 1	A	31 min.	(*Part One* is the only section without superimposition.)
Part 2	AB	6 min.	
	A	6 min.	
	B	6 min.	
Part 3	A	9 min.	
	B	9 min.	
	C	9 min.	
	AB	9 min.	
	AC	9 min.	
	BC	9 min.	
	ABC	9 min.	

Part 4	ABCD	6 min.
	ABC	6 min.
	ABD	6 min.
	ACD	6 min.
	BCD	6 min.
	AB	6 min.
	AC	6 min.
	AD	6 min.
	BC	6 min.
	BD	6 min.
	CD	6 min.
	A	6 min.
	B	6 min.
	C	6 min.
	D	6 min.

Originally Brakhage thought he would call this version *The Complete Dog Star Man*, but he changed his mind after showing it to Robert Kelly, before it had had a public presentation. Brakhage described his decision to alter the title in an unpublished interview with the author:

> Really when I had the sense of being finished with this work was when the four and one-half hour work got a title separate from the seventy-five minute *Dog Star Man* composite. That happened when I visited the Kellys. We looked at all that material in that order I had given it. The morning after we had seen the whole thing, Kelly said at breakfast: "It seems to me you ought to read a life of Johann Sebastian Bach." We took another couple of sips of coffee, and I thought, "Un-humm, well, that would be a good thing to do." Then suddenly he came out with: "Well, to get that sense of form whereby a whole work can exist in the center of another work, or spiral out into pieces in another work, as in Baroque music, and that second arrangement be another piece entirely." I said: "Well, you mean like—but that isn't exactly what happens in *The Art of the Fugue*, but something like that." Suddenly he came out with: "Why don't you call it *The Art of Vision?*" Immediately that seemed to me a completely perfect thing to do.[11]

He removed all the intermediary titles which announce the distinct sections of *Dog Star Man*. Two things immediately apparent from even a glance at the schema are that the present order elongates both the gradual concretion of the *Prelude* and the slow dissolution of *Part Four*, and that proportions of duration are radically altered. Aside from the obvious factor of duration, the longer version distinguishes itself by forcing an analytic procedure upon the viewer and by establishing a new sense of suspense in

the combination or breakdown of superimpositions. Since the *Prelude* begins with its single layers, its colors are more vivid, not being cancelled out by the superimposition layer; its montage is more dynamic, without the elisions; and the visual pauses of black or white leader are more prominent. Since no title indicates the end of roll A and the beginning of B, only an experienced viewer can identify the transition. To a first viewer it would seem one continuous passage until the superimposition appears, but he would be aware of a formal and imagistic echoing of the first half hour of the film in the second. The eye, now familiar with the images in isolation, can discern the metaphors more surely and rapidly when in the third reel they arise through superimposition.

The breakdown of *Part Two*, unlike *Prelude*, decreates; in other words, the baby is divided from what he sees, suggesting that the object of the child's vision is the chaotic imagery of the opening hour and a half. The severing of the two layers, with the object of vision first, and the child later, intensifies the textural analogies between the flashing rock, the skin of the nipple, the internal organs, and the trees.

In *The Art of Vision* the yellow nude at the end of the second roll of *Part Two* smoothes the transition to the colored female nudes that begin *Part Three*, which gradually builds up its layers. By itself, the C roll of heartbeats and hand-painting has an extraordinary beauty which the superimpositions diminish. In creating this image Brakhage was again deliberately trying to revitalize an outworn topos, the use of the heart as a symbol for love. In *The Dead* he had attempted the same kind of redemption of gravestones and the river as icons of death. The physical reality of the heart and its use as an orgasmic rhythm desentimentalize the symbol and make its use in this section potent. Finally, the extreme repetition of the layers of carnal images becomes itself an erotic metaphor.

Since *Part Four* was edited fugally with similar or identical images at significant points on all four layers, there can be no mistaking when one roll ends and the next begins. They all dissolve into flares, splices, and stars and begin again with the rising of the Dog Star Man. The form of the whole series reflects the dissolution within each of the variations as they reach their end. Watching the final hour and a half of variations on *Part Four*, one is impressed by the idea of a cyclical order, which is immanent in *Dog Star Man* as a whole. In the insistent repetition of structures during these fourteen sequences, the cycle becomes a major concept.

Dog Star Man and *The Art of Vision* were made at the height of the mythopoeic phase of American avant-garde cinema. Contemporary with their conception and presentation were Anger's *Scorpio Rising*, Markopoulos's *Twice a Man*, and Harry Smith's *Heaven and Earth Magic*, which I shall discuss in the next chapter. In Brakhage's film, perhaps more intensely than anywhere else, the strains of Romantic and post-Romantic poetry in American art converge with the aesthetics of Abstract Expressionism. The continuities and overlapping of artistic traditions make it difficult to pinpoint the specific vectors involved in the fusion of energies

that went to make up American avant-garde cinema between 1943 and 1970, but some points can be made.

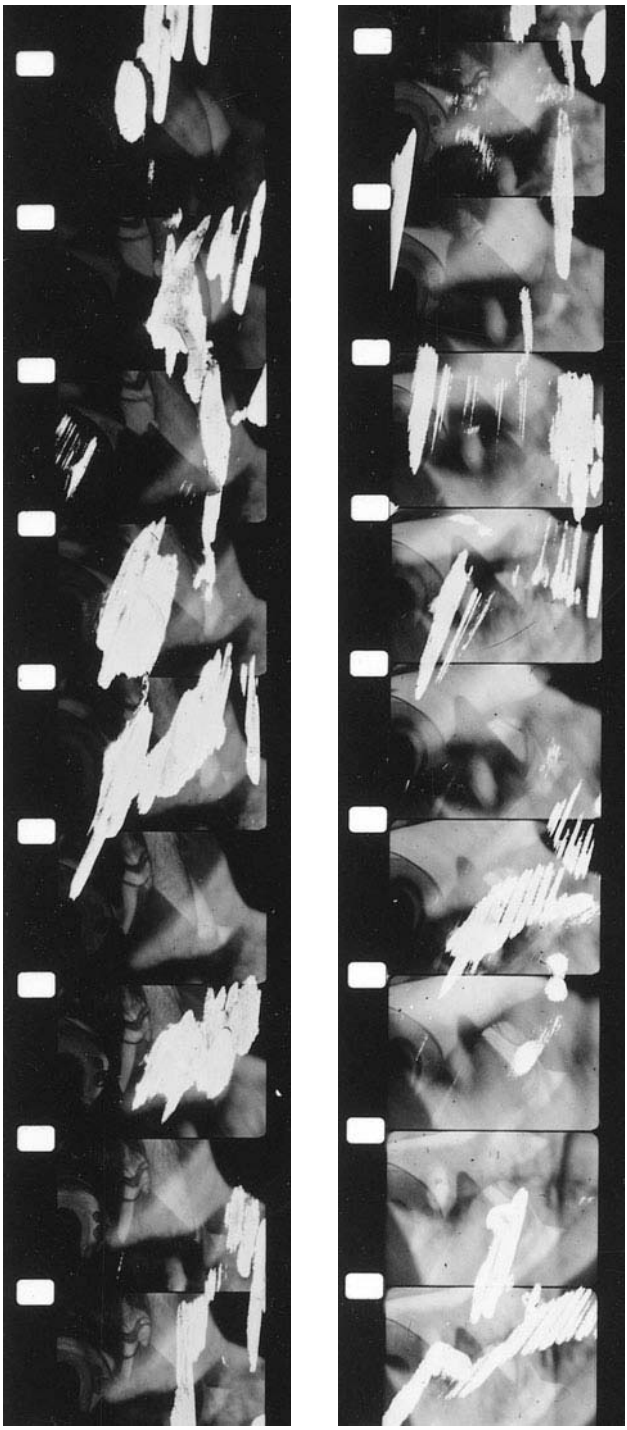
The influx of masters of European modernism into America at the time of the Second World War was a catalyst for significant developments in both film and painting.[12] Yet those developments were not divorced from a native tradition, itself fed by European Romanticism, that can be seen in the poetry of Emerson, Whitman, Dickinson, Pound, Stevens, Crane, Williams, and Zukofsky. What we see today as the unified aesthetic of Abstract Expressionism was earlier a series of fiercely debated questions about form, procedure, and meaning. Although Maya Deren, for example, disassociates herself from the nonobjective painters of the 1940s and attacks them in her *Anagram*, her polemic is infused with a rhetoric they shared, and one sees in her last film, *The Very Eye of Night*, a drift toward late Cubist space—a loss of depth, the breakdown of horizontal and vertical centrality (in this particular case through the rejection of gravitational coordinates), and the affirmation of the screen's surface, accompanied by an abstraction of the narrative tension which myth had given her earlier work. The visual texture and the structural principles of Sidney Peterson's cinema were pointing in the same direction when he turned away from the medium.

Markopoulos and Anger, more secure in their Romantic conventions, resisted both plastic and structural transformations until the very end of the sixties; Broughton strenuously resisted them. It was Brakhage, of all the major American avant-garde film-makers, who first embraced the formal directives and verbal aesthetics of Abstract Expressionism.[13] With his flying camera and fast cutting, and by covering the surface of the celluloid with paint and scratches, Brakhage drove the cinematic image into the space of Abstract Expressionism and relegated the conventional depth of focus to a function of the artistic will, as if to say "the deep axis will appear only when I find it necessary."

The language of revelation and of process which I have excerpted repeatedly from the film-maker's writings and speech recalls the statements of several painters. Jackson Pollock's statement on his process coincides with Brakhage's sense of artistic possession which recurs throughout *Metaphors on Vision*. Pollock wrote:

> When I am *in* my painting, I'm not aware of what I'm doing. It is only after a sort of "get acquainted" period that I see what I have been about. I have no fears about making changes, destroying the image, etc., because the painting has a life of its own. I try to let it come through.[14]

The connection between myth and Abstract Expressionism was not a simple matter to the artists involved. Mark Rothko said:



Abstract Expressionist play of positive and negative space: the filed-out image in Stan Brakhage's *Dog Star Man: Part Three*.

> If our titles recall the known myths of antiquity, we have used them again because they are the eternal symbols upon which we must fall back to express basic psychological ideas. They are the symbols of man's primitive fears and motivations, no matter in which land or what time, changing only in detail but never in substance, be they Greek, Aztec, Icelandic, or Egyptian. And modern psychology finds them still persisting in our dreams, our vernacular, and our art, for all the changes in the outward conditions of life.
>
> Our presentation of these myths, however, must be in our own terms, which are at once more primitive and more modern than the myths themselves—more primitive because we seek the primeval and atavistic roots of the idea rather than the classical version; more modern than the myths themselves because we must redescribe their implications through our own experience.[15]

But Barnett Newman took a contrary position:

> We are reasserting man's natural desire for the exalted, for a concern with our relationship to the absolute emotions. We do not need the obsolete props of an outmoded and antiquated legend. We are creating images whose reality is self-evident and which are devoid of the props and crutches that evoke associations with outmoded images, both sublime and beautiful. We are freeing ourselves of the impediments of memory, association, nostalgia, legend, myth, or what have you.[16]

Ironically, Rothko gave formalistic titles to his canvases while Newman continued to label them with Biblical names ("Abraham," "Jericho"), religious associations ("The Stations of the Cross"), and Greek mythology ("Prometheus Bound"). Pollock vacillated between formalistic and mythic titles ("Lucifer," "Moon Woman Cuts the Circle," and "Cut-Out," "Number One") just as his art had its formalistic and psychological poles.

Brakhage is too eager a dialectician to have ignored this debate, both in its public and its interior forms. In "Margin Alien" he quotes tough-minded Clyfford Still (who persists in labeling his paintings by their dates of completion, e.g., "Painting, 1948-D"):

> We are committed to an unqualified act, not illustrating outworn myths or contemporary alibis. One must accept total responsibility for what he executes. And the measure of his greatness will be the depth of his insight and courage in realizing his own vision. Demands for communication are presumptuous and irrelevant.[17]

Even while he was making *Dog Star Man* Brakhage had inherited the Abstract Expressionist's uneasiness with mythical referents and structures, as the inclusion of this quotation shows. Yet for Brakhage, dialectical uneasiness is a source of strength. Immediately following the references to Still and Michael McClure, another antimythologist, Brakhage prints in corresponding columns excepts from a statement on poetics by Charles Olson and bits of anti-aesthetics from John Cage. And throughout his writing Brakhage argues with himself and against the very need to write: "It is only as of use as useless."

The conception of *Songs* was a dramatic event in Brakhage's life. He had come to New York where he showed the completed *Parts Two* and *Three* of *Dog Star Man* with a vague idea of joining the New American Cinema Exposition then traveling in Europe. While in the city his 16mm equipment was stolen from his car. He collected enough money to get himself and his family back to Colorado, but he did not have funds for new equipment. With the twenty-five dollars paid by his limited insurance on the stolen equipment, he discovered he could buy an 8mm camera and editing materials. He did so. At least three factors were involved in the switch to 8mm, beyond what Brakhage would call the "magical" coincidence of finding the inexpensive equipment when he went looking to replace what he had lost.

In the first place, he wanted to get away from the giant form of *The Art of Vision* which had occupied him for seven years. Then, there was a definite economic advantage in making 8mm films: materials and laboratory prices were much lower than for 16mm work, and one could not be tempted into costly printing work (mixing layers of film, fades, etc.) simply because no laboratory undertook to do that in 8mm. All superimposition, dissolving, and fading had to be done in the camera. Finally, Brakhage saw a polemical advantage in the switch. Not only would his example dignify and encourage younger film-makers who could afford to work only in 8mm, but he would be able to realize, on a limited scale, a dream he had had for years of selling copies of his films, rather than just renting them, to people for home viewing. Since the early 1960s he had been prophesying a breakthrough for the avant-garde film-maker when films would be available for purchase like books, records, and painting reproductions and could therefore be owned and screened many times and at pleasure.

In the beginning Brakhage had no idea that *Songs* would become a single, serial work. Even after making the first eight sections he resisted that idea. But by the spring of 1965, with ten Songs finished in a little more than a year, he began to speak of the totality of the work in progress: "I think there will be more Songs. I do definitely see that they relate to each other. That is, practically every Song has images in it that occur in some other Song, if not in two or three others. The more remarkable thing is that each Song is distinct from each other; that holds them together in

a very crucial kind of 'tension.' "[18] Within another year he was punning on the relation of a Song's number in the series to its subject (*XV Song Traits, 23rd Psalm Branch*); soon after that he was wondering when they would end. They did conclude, with a dedication to the film-maker Jerome Hill, after thirty Songs, or punning again, *American Thirties Song*, in 1969.

Brakhage's capsule descriptions, written for his own sales catalogue, describe with varying degrees of directness the subjects of the individual Songs.

SONGS

Go, little naked and impudent songs,
Go with a light foot!
(Or with two light feet, if it please you!)
Go and dance shamelessly!
Go with an impertinent frolic!
Greet the grave and the stodgy,
Salute them with your thumbs at your noses.
Ezra Pound, "Salutation the Second."

SONG I (1964); 4 min. Color. A portrait of a beautiful woman.
SONGS II & III (1964); 7 min. Color. An envisionation of fire and a mind's movement in remembering.
SONG IV (1964); 4 min. Color. A round-about three girls playing with a ball . . . hand-painted over photo image.
SONG V (1964); 7 min. Color. A child-birth song, . . . I think my best birth film yet.
SONGS VI & VII (1964); 7 min. Color.
VI: A song of the painted veil—arrived at via moth-death.
VII: A San Francisco song—portrait of the City of Brakhage dreams.
SONG VIII (1964); 4 min. Color. A sea creatures song—a seeing of ocean as creature.
SONG IX & X (1965); 10 min. Color.
IX: a wedding song—of source and substance of marriage.
X: a sitting around song.
SONG XI (1965); 6 min. Color. A black velvet film of fires, windows, insect life, and a lyre of rain scratches.
SONG XII (1965); 6 min. Black and white. Verticals and shadows—reflections caught in glass traps.
SONG XIII (1965); 6 min. Color. A travel song of scenes and horizontals.
SONG XIV (1965); 3 min. Color. A "closed-eye" vision song composed of molds, paints, and crystals.
XV SONG TRAITS (1965); 75 min. Color. A series of individual portraits of friends and family, all interrelated in what might

be called a branch growing directly from the trunks of SONGS I-XIV. In order of appearance: Robert Kelly, Jane and our dog Durin, our boys Bearthm, and Rarc, daughter Crystal and the canary Cheep Donkey, Robert Creeley and Michael McClure, the rest of our girls Myrrena & Neowyn, Angelo diBenedetto, Rarc, Ed Dorn and his family, Myrrena, Neowyn, and Jonas Mekas (to whom the whole of the XVTH SONG is dedicated), as well as some few strangers, were the source of these TRAITS coming into being—my thanks to all . . . and to all who see them clearly.

SONG XVI (1965); 8 min. Color. A love song, a flowering of sex as in the mind's eye, a joy.

SONGS XVII & XVIII (1965); 7 min. Color. Cathedral and movie house—the ritual memories of religion—and then (in SONG XVIII) a portrait of a singular room in the imagination.

SONGS XIX & XX (1965); 8 min. Color. A dancing song of women's rites, and then (SONG XX) the ritual of light making shape/shaping picture.

SONGS XXI & XXII (1966); 8 min. Color. Transformation-of-the-singular-image was the guiding aesthetic light in the making of these two works.

SONG XXI works its spell thru closed-eye-vision, whereas SONG XXII was inspired by approximates of "the dot-plane" or "grain field" of closed-eye-vision in textured "reality," so to speak. You could say that XXI arises out of an inner- and XXII into an outer-reality. These two works are particularly exciting to me because I at last accomplished something in the making of them that I had written hopefully to Maya Deren about years ago: films which could be run forwards AND backwards with equal/integral authenticity—that is that the run from end to beginning would hold to the central concern of the film . . . rather than simply being some wind and/or unwinding of beginning-to-ending's continuum. SONG XXII, additionally, can be run from its mid-point—the singular sun-star shape on water—in either direction to beginning or ending . . . thus film inherits the possibilities Gabrieli gave to music with his piece "My beginning is my ending and my ending is my beginning."

SONG XXIII: 23RD PSALM BRANCH (1966–67); 100 min. Color.

Part I—A study of war, created in the imagination in the wake of newsreel death and destruction. . . . We had moved around a lot and we had settled down enough . . . so we got a TV. And that was something in the house that I could simply not photograph, simply could not deal with visually. It was pouring forth war guilt, primarily, into the household in a way

that I wanted to relate to, if I was guilty, but I had feelings . . . of the qualities of guilt and I wanted to have it real for me and I wanted to deal with it.

And, I mean, it was happening on all the programs—on the ads as well as drama and even the comedies, and of course the news programs. And I had to deal with that. It finally became such a crisis that I knew I couldn't deal directly with TV but perhaps I could make or find out why war was all that unreal to me. . . .

Part II—A searching-into the "sources" of *Part I*, it is composed of the following sections: Peter Kubelka's Vienna, My Vienna, A Tribute to Freud, Nietzsche's Lamb, East Berlin, and Coda.

SONGS XXIV & XXV (1967); 10 min. Color. A naked boy and flute song and (XXV) a being about nature.

SONG XXVI (1967); 8 min. Color. A "conversation piece"—a viz-a-visual, inspired by the (e) motional properties of talk: drone, bird-like twitterings, statement terror, and bombast.

MY MOUNTAIN SONG XXVII (1968); 26 min. Color. A study of Arapahoe Peak in all the seasons of two years' photography . . . the clouds and weathers that shape its place in landscape—much of the photography a-frame-at-a-time: *Rivers* (1968); 36 min. Color. A series of eight films intended to echo the themes of MY MOUNTAIN, SONG XXVII.

SONG XXVIII (1968); 4 min. Color. A song of scenes as texture.

SONG XXIX (1969); 4 min. Color. A portrait of the artist's mother.

AMERICAN THIRTIES SONG (1969); 30 min. Color. This film, preceded by a portrait of the artist's father, is a long ode to the drives and driving spirit of the nineteen-thirties and of some of the shapes and textures these energies created across the American landscape. This film is dedicated to Jerome Hill, whose image appears at the end of its "postlude."[19]

The scope of *Songs* ranges from the immediate recording of the objects of a room by the film-maker sitting in a chaise-longue (*Song X*) to massive meditations on war in two long parts, the second of which has six subdivisions (*23rd Psalm Branch*). But even that most complex of the *Songs* contains moments and parts resembling the simplest. The persistence and diversity of the simple strategies define the elusive unity of the serial work. As far as Brakhage may go in forging a complex vision out of the reluctant materials of 8mm, he always returns to the immediate, the sketch, the familiar—whatever risks being overlooked. The peripety of the thirty *Songs* circumscribes Brakhage the lyricist and apocalyptic visionary while he seeks to discover the limits of his new tool, the 8mm camera and film surface.

Several of the *Songs* reconsider the questions, emotions, and situations of his earlier films. *Song V*, punning on the birth of his fifth child, brings to mind both *Window Water Baby Moving* and *Thigh Line Lyre Triangular*, without the drama of the first or the inwardness of the other.

In *Song* VI he looks again for an image of death while filming the last moments of a moth against the background of flowered linoleum. Without the possibility of solarization (as in *The Dead*) or collage (as in *Mothlight*), the film-maker must seek simpler means, and he develops a tension between the focus on the moth and the linoleum under him, visually incarnating Shelley's description of the filter between eternal and human life as a "painted veil."

In *Song XVI* he once again attempted to redeem a trite metaphor as he had previously done in *The Dead* and *Part Three* of *Dog Star Man*. Bracketed by shots of a misty landscape, the film compares flowers to sexual organs, and with its continual slow zooms on two layers of superimposition it evokes the rhythms of lovemaking. Often the erotic images are indistinct, but at the opening there are nipples, and then an erect penis is caressed. The film proceeds from the explicit to the suggestive. At the film's climax an orange fan of coral replaces the flowers. Then the end comes quickly: buttocks superimposed with other pieces of coral and starfish amid flares of orange. The transformation of the flowers into coral provides the film's finest moment; otherwise the flower imagery falls short of the film-maker's redemptive aspiration for it.

The unity of *Songs* as a whole does not depend entirely on the sometimes reassuring, sometimes startling reuse of specific images from earlier *Songs* in later ones. Even though 8mm superimposition must be done in the camera, which denies the frame-to-frame precision possible in 16mm dual-track editing, Brakhage makes extensive use of it. In numerous *Songs* there are isolated superimposed images cut into the texture of the film, but in the following films, superimposition is a major force shaping the totality: *I, II, V, VII, VIII, XII*; "Jane and the Boys," "Angelo," "Myrrena," and "Neowyn" from *XV Song Traits; XVI, XVII, XXII*; and "Nietzsche's Lamb" and the "Coda" from the *23rd Psalm Branch*.

Painting, scratching, and the laying of dots over the image appear periodically in the series, despite the immense difficulty of working on the surface of a film strip that has only one-fourth the area of 16mm. *Songs IV, XIV, XXII*, and the first part and "Nietzsche's Lamb" from the *23rd Psalm Branch* depend upon these techniques. Close in texture to the hand-painted *Songs* are the nonobjective works (XI, XX, XXI), exhibiting for the most part patterns of pure light.

Despite the extreme mobility of the 8mm camera, the *Songs* depend less on camera movement than the earlier lyrical films. Brakhage's fight with the natural world seems at first to have quieted and his inwardness diminished. With couplings such as *XXI* and *XXII* and "Rivers" following *Song XXVII: My Mountain*, the opposition of consciousness to the natural

world reaffirms itself; once again the accent is upon the visionary seer, not what he sees. In the light of the whole series, the opposition of early couplets such as *II* and *III* grows clearer. Again, the clues lie in the filmmaker's note: "An envisionation of fire and a mind's movement in remembering."

Song II shows air distorted by heat, as if just above a burning fire, and the sinking sun intercut with rapids of water. It invokes the concept of fire without showing a flame. In *III*, on the other hand, the same images of rushing water form a rhythmic montage, alternating directions, into which undistinguished shots of a street are injected and lost. Bits of an exceptionally grainy green leader, which at first divide the movements of water, eventually dominate the film. The displacement of emphasis reduces the water from presence to a metaphor for the eccentric movements of the grain. In the unpublished interview I have quoted before, Brakhage describes the making of this film:

> We were listening to Brahms' *Third Symphony* and became very tortured by the incredible beauty of its seeming to build up various kinds of tension and never breaking through any of them. I said, "That is a mind process: the way in which the mind gets hung up magnificently." It was such a disturbing moment that when we finished listening to it we were so excited and at the same time frustrated that Jane rushed out into the night to take a walk and I immediately picked up some green leader which had been baked in the sun . . . that seemed to stand for some basic impulse of mine. The question was what could I drop into that space? Water, of course, was there. Water shots relate to the grain.
>
> I struggled to get something else in there by dropping in a photographic shot. I borrowed what had come with the little 8mm viewer I bought at this time. It was shot by the man who owned the camera store; some shots out of his window of a scene in Boulder. It was quite photographic; quite like a picture postcard with moving cars. It became possible by editing this green leader very carefully, so that it built a certain tension, to drop this scene into it via the water shots, which then could be drowned by water in another scene. That was a breakthrough which could make the leader relate to water and then fall back into being just the basic strata of mind movement.[20]

Brakhage never made any changes in already finished *Songs* to bring them into a more explicit relationship with later ones. Some of the oppositions are obviously deliberate, such as *II* and *III, XXI* and *XXII*, and others less conscious. But there is no overall antithesis, even of the most eccentric order. Instead of a center of gravity, *Songs* has a turning point in the *23rd Psalm Branch*, the longest and most intricate of the works.

Here the repudiation of the physical world in favor of the poetic consciousness exceeds Brakhage's previous extremes, but two films later, in *Song XXV*, the vehemence is qualified and calmed.

Numerically, although not temporally, in the center of the thirty films are the *XV Song Traits*. The form of the portrait radiates through the *Songs*, including *I, XXIV*, and *XXIX* with fragmentary portraits worked into the first part of the *23rd Psalm Branch* and the end of the *American Thirties Song*. Superimposition and synecdoche are the predominant tropes of the film-maker's portraiture. *Song I* shows several full figures of his wife Jane in a striped robe reading and making gestures, whose individuality are emphasized by slightly fast-motion recording. In superimposition, passing boulders can be seen from a car, and toward the end of the film there are successive entrances of someone through a doorway. Brakhage defines "Robert Kelly" through close-ups of his hands, pointing and cutting cheese, with occasional reference to his face, but not full-figure. Again in "Jane and Durin," he gives us parts of the event without the wide view; the image will rest on his wife's ankle or on the dog's stomach as she scratches him. Only in the final and dedicatory portrait of Jonas Mekas does he combine close-up gestures with characteristic movements of the whole body without recourse to superimposition.

Within the limits of the film-maker's conception of portraiture, the range of his formal invention is wide. That conception comes close to an older desire which he shared with Maya Deren and about which he corresponded with her—that of creating a cinematic haiku form. On the one hand, the simplified superimposition of 8mm may be compared to the haiku's juxtaposition of two isolated images. On the other hand, Brakhage also employs a two-part form in some of the simpler Songs. The synecdoches of Kelly, for instance, precede the appearance, fragmentation, and reappearance of a moving geometrical form resembling the diagram of election orbits around a nucleus or planets around a sun, filmed off a television monitor. "The Dorns" contrasts snapshots of the poet Ed Dorn and his family with color-filmed images, as if the film-maker was looking at the photographs and remembering the moving scene.

Synecdoche is crucial to all of Brakhage's cinema, but in *Song XVIII* it attains a prominence comparable to the portraits. The "portrait of a singular room in the imagination" consists of shadows, illuminated corners, bits of wall decoration, surfaces abstracted beyond identification, and a closing door. Critic Guy Davenport informs us that we are in a dentist's office in this film.[21]

The portrait of "Crystal," by way of contrast to the simple structures so far described, uses parallel montage as intricately as the most elaborate of the Songs except the *23rd Psalm Branch*. Above all it recalls the play of diverse elements in the epithalamion *Song IX*. A very washed-out, dim shot of young Crystal Brakhage crying repeats itself amid images of snow outside a window, a canary in a cage, people and reflections at an airport (reminiscent of *Song XII* without quoting from it), children's drawings,

horses in a blizzard, and changes of light intensity through a window. The movements of the camera and the elisions and collisions of the editing return to the visual rhetoric of *Anticipation of the Night*. The elements of the portrait combine to describe the anxiety of a child away from home, and the repeated emphasis on the cage and even more on looking out of the windows of the house raises the metaphor of the self as the center of both the house and the cage.

In *Song IX* similar camera movements and montage seem more spectacular because the images they fuse together are more disparate. A rhinoceros pacing back and forth in a cage with a patch of sunlight on his hide establishes the initial tempo, into which are cut shots of an outdoor wedding by moonlight, two naked children in sex play, a door opening on an empty room, and later a moving shot out of the same room with a young man silhouetted in it. The jittery dance of the moon over the wedding party makes specific the allusion to *Anticipation of the Night* which is felt in the construction. There also appears a brief quotation of a window by the sea taken from the beginning of *Song VII*. For Davenport, whose insights on the Songs are always valuable, the collision of the wedding party with the rhinoceros and the "nonchalantly and impudently naked" children make the film "a comic masterpiece. . . . Brakhage's sense of humor is the most difficult of his strategies," he tells us. "In an age of largely feminine humor, he remains doggedly masculine in his laughter."[22]

His point is well taken; for of the erotic Songs this is the only piece of ribaldry. In place of *Song XVI* which Davenport admires, I would propose *Song XIX* as the high point of sexual energy in the series. The film centers upon slow and fast motion alternations of a woman and a girl dancing. One appears to be the film-maker's wife, but it is difficult to be certain of identifications in the silhouette effect that their moving bodies create in the dim foreground with a bright window behind. The other seems in her late adolescence. At first the camera picks out from their slow movements slow jumps of the feet or flights of arms. Sometimes only a corner or edge of the now blackened screen has a flickering image, a rhythmic synecdoche of the dance. As they accelerate to a humping motion, or so the camera makes them seem, the shadows merge their jagged edges in an erotic fusion. Through an open door, bright leaves can be seen blown by the wind and speeded up by the camera until their shimmering recalls the dancers. Another, younger, girl watches from the doorway as the blending of bodies becomes frantic, until the image burns out in flares.

With the return of a picture we see an altogether different couple, a man and a woman standing outside with their dog. The zoom slowly pulls back from this black-and-white image, returning inside by montage to the fast dance and dim colors several times. The zoom continues to the end of the film, revealing a house, then its grounds, a whole village, and finally an arid landscape of hills in which the village is situated. Night is falling. In a *diminuendo* of erotic tension the returns to the dance now show the smaller girl taking part accompanied by playful leaps of her dog.

Brakhage has said that this was filmed during a visit to Robert Creeley's family in New Mexico. Presumably Creeley and his wife were the figures before the house, and his two daughters were dancing with Jane Brakhage. Creeley had already appeared in the most exceptional of the portraits. As he sits and rises from a chair, he changes from positive to negative, an intensely subjective image with a presentiment of aging. This portrait and the following staccato pixilation of McClure putting on a beast's head were originally shot and edited in 16mm and reduced, to be included in *XV Song Traits* as well as released in 16mm as *Two: Creeley/McClure*. The solarization of the Creeley portrait would be impossible in 8mm where there is neither negative film nor laboratory superimposition.

The furthest that Brakhage came in extending the language of 8mm cinema was his editing of the *23rd Psalm Branch*. Here he managed to create extended passages of dynamic montage out of two-frame (one-twelfth of a second) elements. He solved the problem of cluttering the screen with hundreds of splicing marks by introducing two frames of black leader between every shot, causing a rapid winking effect in the projection of the film but hiding the splices. He also succeeded in applying several sizes and varieties of ink dots to the surface of the 8mm image; at times hundreds seem to be clustered in the tiny frames.

The phenomenal and painstaking craftsmanship of this film reflects the intensity of the obsession with which its theme grasped his mind. In 1966, out of confusion about the Vietnam war and the American reaction to it, with which he had to deal in the question periods following his lectures on various campuses, Brakhage began to meditate on the nature of war. He amassed a collection of war documentaries and diligently studied newsreels and political speeches on television to the point of speculating on the significance of recurring clusters and shapes of the dots on the television screen; he read memoirs and battle descriptions, Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, and he claimed to read Tacitus instead of the daily newspaper at breakfast because the intrigues were the same and better written in the first century historian's version. The fruit of his studies and thoughts was the longest and most important of the Songs. A tour of lectures, in which he tried to express what could not be contained in the film was so confused and self-tortured in style that it approached madness.

If any of the earlier Songs seemed to assert the priority of nature over imagination, that impression has no place in the *23rd Psalm Branch*; it is an apocalypse of the imagination. The consciousness of the film-maker moves between his idea of home and the self and his vision of war. A very fast pan of a passing landscape, as if shot from a car on a highway, stops short continually with the flashing interjection of dead bodies from stock black-and-white footage and flickerings of solid colors. In the prolongation of this effect the short images of death are sometimes painted over.

The first release from this insistent prologue comes as the words "Take back Beethoven's 9th, then, he said" are scratched in black leader.[23] They

are the first of several quotations in the film. Another continuous pan follows, shot like the first but showing a deep passing land- and townscape rather than a moving flat blur. Into this lateral movement he first cuts a series of explosions, then explosions mixed with guns firing, the atomic bomb, a flood, cannon exploding, water leaping over a dam, tactical bombs, and burning buildings. At times the montage of horrors pursues its own split-second dynamic as if forgetting to relocate itself in the passing American landscape.

In his lectures at the time, Brakhage maintained a desperate fatalism. He spoke of war as a "natural disaster," assigning it an inevitable role like that of tornadoes or earthquakes. At times his audiences, and perhaps he himself, took this postulate to be a reconciliation with the fact of war, when within the film it was another, more vehement attack on nature.

A color flicker transfers us to a second text, a letter being written by the film-maker as he sits bare-chested in the sun. The speed of the panning makes it difficult to read. "Dear Jane," it begins, "The checker boards and zig-zags of man." On the next line we can only catch the crucial word "Nature." Turning from the letter, the camera shows us stones, fast movements over the ground, and flashes of a blue-tinted sun until a multicolored, hand-painted passage intrudes. It precedes a fast montage of images of the home, including visual quotations of the nude children from the "Neowyn" portrait and sledge riding from "Myrrena and Neowyn." The pace of the editing relaxes with shots of laundry on a wash line, a donkey, the sky. Airplane wings introduce a return to the letter, and the subsequent quick cutting of wings, clouds, and aerial views of the ground illustrate the expressions "zig-zags" and "checker boards."

After another color flicker and a passage of hand-painting, a third quotation, in the form of an open book of poetry, emerges. It is the beginning of the eleventh section of Louis Zukofsky's *A*:

> River, that must turn full after I stop dying
> Song, my song, raise grief to music
> Light as my loves' thought, the few sick
> So sick of wrangling: thus weeping
> Sounds of light, stay in her keeping
> And my son's face—this much for honor.

The second line is most readable in the camera's panning. "Song, my song, raise grief to music" defines the aspiration of the film and the cry of the film-maker. Another burst of explosions and bombs brackets a visual repetition of the poem.

Fast animation of children's drawings, also warlike, introduces a flickering alternation between them and the film-maker's face; and then the face alone flickers amid bits of blackness. The same fragmenting rhythm presents two warriors fighting in a print of a Hellenic vase, which disap-

pears in red flares. Then, after a pause of blackness, the camera draws back from the face of the poet Zukofsky. His name on his book identifies him for those who do not recognize his rarely photographed face. Another zoom shows, dimly, his wife Celia. We see the poet only once more; that is after an exposition of colored frames mixed with the wrecks of buildings. But this time the movement away from his face leads to a series of Jews in concentration camps, as the film-maker considers what might have been the poet's fate had he lived in Europe thirty years before.

One of the conclusions which Brakhage reached in his study of newsreels, propounded in his lectures, was that crowds take a distinctive shape under the spirit of war. That shape, he held, defies the limitations of police restraint or topological constriction. Furthermore, the size of the crowd does not change the shape. Illustrating not this mysterious shape, but the identity of crowds, Brakhage cut another montage of equivalences out of his documentaries and placed it after the Zukofsky portrait. Here the lines of a parade and those of a procession within a cathedral do take the same linear shape, but then quick cuts of Hitler marching, numerous parades, religious processions, funerals, crowds cheering, tickertape celebrations, and crowds fighting police all flow together in a sustained explosion of mass frenzy.

From then until the scratched declaration several minutes later, "I can't go on," the pace of the montage generally maintains this intensity as the images shift slightly from crowds to a meeting of generals or the signing of a treaty, obscured by tiny ink dots which change their size and the direction of their drift across the screen continually.

But after the declaration Brakhage *does* go on, continuing for a short time the comparison of weaponry and moving the sequence toward the end with the slow fall into the sea of a single burning airplane, an action extended by progressively longer interruptions of black leader. From a last burst of explosions he returns to the letter by way of a split-screen effect I shall describe below. The speed of the cutting makes it difficult to be sure of the text. He writes, "I must stop. The war *is* as thoughts/ patterns are—as endless as . . . precise as eye's hell *is!*"

When 8mm films are prepared for multiple printing, a master is made on 16mm with two bands: on the right, half the film is printed from top to bottom; on the left, the other half is printed in the opposite direction. After the master is printed, a machine splits the double strip down the middle. Brakhage had an 8mm reduction made of the 16mm master. He thus had a copy of the film with four frames on the screen; a sequence of two on the left and two, upside-down, on the right. Before the last shots of the letter the film-maker provides us with a taste of his later recapitulation by introducing a piece from the middle of the master, but after we read Brakhage's handwriting, he starts from the beginning, including the titles with the fragmented and accelerated repetition (since four frames pass at the rate of one). This tactic provides an alternative to the conclusion of

Dog Star Man/The Art of Vision; it dissolves the tension of the film by suggesting that the events depicted are cyclic while it reduces the illusion to cinematic physicality.

Brakhage must have felt the cyclical and tautological conclusion insufficient for this film, since he followed it with a second part. There he reconsidered the idea of war in terms of what he saw in front of him as he traveled in eastern Europe. The whole reformulation is called "To Source" and opens with a short prologue of a lamp superimposed over a landscape and night lights. The first two subsections are obviously antithetical: "Of Peter Kubelka's Vienna" and "My Vienna." The former is a parallel montage of six elements: Kubelka playing his recorder, a view of a building shot from below, "Stop" and "Go" traffic lights in alternation, Kubelka walking on the streets of Vienna with a young child, and a statue in a public square.

"My Vienna" begins with Brakhage's vision of himself in a foreign city and then moves from his thoughts of home to his imagination of wartime Vienna, and ends with an ambiguous comparison of art to death.

As he films images of falling snow from a Viennese window the scene shifts to his home in Colorado; first to the window from Crystal's portrait, then to the sledges of "Myrrena and Neowyn" and the nude children of "Neowyn," all quoted from XV *Song Traits*. Still in Colorado, but with unfamiliar shots, the door of his house opens, the fire burns in the hearth, and Jane appears. This sequence has a red tone which elides with the switch back to Vienna, where Brakhage, Kubelka, and a woman, all toned red, are still at the table. Regular alternations move between Vienna and Colorado until the film-maker's imagination of the past calls up the image of Hitler from an old documentary. The film ends with the mixture of several artistic representations of Christ and documentary footage of dead bodies.

"My Vienna" restates the more complex dialectic of the whole of *Part One* of this film. The transformation of apprehension into dreadful imaginings is clearly illustrated by the positing of the middle terms of association: Kubelka's family reminds Brakhage of his own; the streets of Vienna bring to mind the damage to them during the war; the Christian idealization of the suffering of Jesus makes him consider the inglorious destruction of men by war.

The next three sections, "A Tribute to Freud," "Nietzsche's Lamb," and "East Berlin," gradually apply a brake to the dynamics of everything that preceded them. They are intellectually and formally the simplest of the subsections, although "Nietzsche's Lamb" must be characterized as the most complex of the three.

"A Tribute to Freud" not only pays homage to the father of psychoanalysis by recording a pilgrimage through Vienna to the house where he lived; it indirectly salutes the poet H. D. by borrowing the title of her memoir of Freud. The most striking image of this section occurs at the

very end. It is a transparent group of female figures, like the Muses, on the glass of the door Freud must have moved through daily.

"Nietzsche's Lamb" combines images of an airplane flight (presumably the film-maker's return from Europe) with shots of a skinned lamb in a theatrical event by Hermann Nitsch. Montage at the beginning smoothed over and periodically almost obliterated by paint and dots becomes superimposition in the second half of the film. The title puns on the happening-maker's name and that of the nineteenth-century philosopher.

There is an ambivalence in Brakhage's attitude toward Nitsch's Dionysiac art. He cannot disassociate it from the contexts of war and his impressions of Eastern Europe. As he films the ground from above, zooming down and back, he associates that vision with aerial maps of cities and a relief globe of the world. More enigmatic are two quotations from *Song XIX* of the dancing girl cut into "Nietzsche's Lamb," until we recall the ritual element in Brakhage's description of that film: the quotation is another pun, "a dancing song of women's rites." The theatrical ritual of the *Manifest Der Lamm* finds its counterpart in the spontaneous rite of *Song XIX*.

The last and most mysterious section of the film brings us back to Europe and "East Berlin." Both "Nietzsche's Lamb" and "East Berlin" seek to ground Brakhage's experience of Europe in "closed-eye vision." In the former he achieved this through over-painting so that the maps, aerial views, boats, dances, and so on seemed to become concrete out of the cracks and colors of the paint, which at times completely obfuscated the image underneath. In "East Berlin" he transferred strategies from painting to combining flares, images only of lights against a black sky, and finally moving dots.

In making the *23rd Psalm Branch* Brakhage was responding to the anxiety around him about the Vietnam War. In the terms which I have been using to discuss his vision, the force with which that war entered his thoughts challenged the metaphysical priority of the inner man. The finished film confirms the autonomy of the imagination and incorporates war through strategies of generalization, the dialectic of ideas and sights, contrasting subjective experiences of a single place, the oblique reference to the author of *Civilization and Its Discontents*, and finally closed-eye vision.

The "Coda" begins with a complete rupture from the images and techniques of the rest of the film and ends with a disquieting metaphor for the undefeatable impulse to war within the human spirit. This final image is all the more disturbing because it occurs in a joyous mood at the end of a brief pastorale. The "Coda" begins in the portrait style; a man and a woman, playing music, lead without rupture to the final superimposition. A group of children play and dance in the woods at night waving burning sparklers while the image of a donkey fades in and out several times in superimposition. The terrible association of the sparkler dance with the Nazi *Walpurgisnacht* arise, perhaps the more dreadfully because Brakhage

does not emphasize them with a montage of analogies. Thus this film, which had made an equation among parades, victory celebrations, street fights, and rallies, culminates in a cyclic vision and a discovery of the seeds of war in the pastoral vision.[24]

Song XXVII: My Mountain follows the structure of the *23rd Psalm Branch*: a long abstract presentation in the first part, then a second part of eight "Rivers" qualifying the first part in terms of the self. For approximately the first twenty minutes of the twenty-six-minute-long first part, Brakhage presents shot after shot of a mountain peak, snow-covered throughout the change of seasons. Clouds and mists have a prominent role in this film; they can completely obscure the peak, sweep over it in fast motion, or begin a shot by blocking it, only to clear away, or the reverse; sometimes the film-maker even veers from the mountain to show cloud formations.

According to his statements, Brakhage was studying Dutch and Flemish painting while working on this film. He singled out Van Eyck for his attention to figures at the very edge of the composition. Brakhage did not use a tripod to film any of the images in *Song XXVII*, he claims. The laborious work of taking single frames of cloud movements must have been done while he was steadying the camera in his hands. This method causes slight movements on the edge of the frame which are almost unnoticeable when the eye fixes itself on the centered mountain peak. The illusion of fixity in the center and shimmering at the edges of the screen creates a visual tension which the film-maker felt would be lost if the viewer sensed the solidity of a tripod and the impossibility of variation.

If we recall that the lucid, even triumphal inwardness of the *23rd Psalm Branch* was exceptional within the *Songs*, we can see how the uneasy relation with the natural world, more characteristic of the series as a whole, reasserts itself in the first part of *Song XXVII: My Mountain*. With the change of techniques and the shift of the center of attention at the end of the film, Brakhage begins the undermining or subjectification of what had been the most self-enduring natural image in the whole of *Songs*.

In Romantic poetry the image of the mountain has repeatedly initiated a reaffirmation of the self and the imagination. In his study of landscape in Romanticism, Paul de Man quotes passages from Rousseau, Wordsworth, and Hölderlin on Alpine landscapes. "Each of these texts describes the passage from a certain type of nature, earthly and material, to another nature which could be called mental and celestial."[25]

The primary reflex of each of the "Rivers" is to move from an opening shot of the mountain, or its clouds, to a more interiorized image. The eight sections range between the explicit and the hermetic. In the first of them, after a quick intercutting of the mountain and flames, Brakhage calls attention to the mechanism of the camera through a variation on the jumping image at the end of the first part. Here the distortion of the picture is not complete; the loss of a loop in the camera resulted in a small fluttering, a ghost-like flickering above a more solid form. With this technique he

shows us parts of a small town: traffic lights changing color, a church steeple. The section ends, without fluttering, in fast pans back and forth over the mountain, undermining its presence and asserting that of the film-maker.

In discussing the portrait "Crystal," I made the point that Brakhage uses the mediation of a smeared, streaked, or dimly-reflecting window while recording an outside view, as a metaphor for the circumference of the self. In "Rivers" he makes extensive use of this trope. The sixth section, which like the first begins with an intercutting of mountain and fire, quickly settles upon a long series of images of two horses in the snow. They are seen through a window in which are reflected flames and sometimes shimmering patterns of light. The next part, another portrait of Jane Brakhage, begins with her looking out of a window. The film-maker is outside filming in. From this image we can trace the window trope back to Maya Deren and *Meshes of the Afternoon*. Like the heroine of that film, Jane Brakhage mediates a subjective reflection; with one splice we see her younger, with much longer hair, sitting outside with her three daughters. In the middle of the film a composite use of the window mediation appears when Brakhage films his daughters, now older than when we first saw them, looking out of the window; he is shooting from inside his car, whose windshield wipers cross the image.

The most explicit of the sections, "River 4," makes the fullest use of the window. Shot from one of the upper stories of Denver's largest hotel, it shows the neon and white lights of the city at night while in the foreground the standing nude body of the film-maker can be seen in the window's reflection. He concentrates on the reflection of his palm which leads immediately to shots of a frosted window intercut for several minutes with aerial views of mountain ranges, as if arising in the metaphoric imagination as he contemplates the lines of his hand.

Brakhage subscribes to the belief, most forcefully put forward among his contemporaries by Charles Olson, that the artistic sensibility has privileged access to a holistic vision. In the *American Thirties Song* he explores the aerial view as a tool for discovering patterns not immediately visible to the grounded observer. From the aerial perspective he records the shape of farm lands and cities and the organization of residential blocks. From the title and from his notes we learn that he associates these patterns with American life in the 1930s, when he was born.

Before the titles, very fast blurred panning movements recall the opening of the *23rd Psalm Branch*. Out of these movements come quick, jittery glimpses of the face of Brakhage's father. The speed decelerates. An old woman is hanging out her wash. We see the old hands of Brakhage's father inside an automobile. After the title the portrait shifts to the more familiar, synecdochic style. In dim red outline we see the shape of the man's bald head, his shoes, his hands calling to mind the more sinister *Song XXIX*, and another dim red portrait of the film-maker's mother, who appears almost androgynous in her old age.

From the obscurity of the portrait the film moves to a short, bright movement of kitsch—flamingo designs in a bathroom, a few Roman Catholic household images, a picture of Jesus as a shepherd, an angel doll. As the *Songs* touch upon social behavior, Brakhage is careful not to use images in a strictly ironic manner; the visual studies of middle-class neighborhoods and decorating styles are presented in this film as fact, without condemnation by the film-maker. While he was making the *American Thirties Song*, Brakhage developed a passionate interest in American genre painting, which informs many aspects of this film.

Early in the film a car ride through a residential neighborhood with the camera jerkily recording passing trees and barely distinguishing the houses beyond them turns into an abstract metaphor: bluish trees become lines of water and a whirl of yellow lights.

The most striking of the interludes returns to the structures of *Song XIII*, the travel song, in the middle of the film which is itself largely an extension of that earlier *Song*. In a slightly elliptical sequence of shots a ferry or tourist boat docks at a pier in New York's Hudson River. Each shot in the sequence begins in an impressionistic blur as a mist quickly evaporates on the lens.[26] Then in superimposition he combines passing trains, or at times views from a moving train, with other harbor scenes in a smooth texture of elision. Ocean liners move on the river; isolated smokestacks gush up steam and smoke and cross the bottom of the frame. When the river scenes end temporarily, the train superimposition continues over a view from above of a city hotdog cart and its owner.

The last third of the film exclusively employs aerial imagery. From this there is a smooth transition to the dedicatory "Postlude." In synecdochic compositions and with short elliptical jumps, the film-maker shows an airport, the landing of a jet, the movement of a baggage wagon, the taxiing of the airplane, the fitting of the deboarding tube, and finally the emergence of the film-maker Jerome Hill among the passengers. A sweep of sprocket holes, a final reminder of the artifice of film, precedes the concluding signature.

Although there is a complete absence of mythological reference in the *Songs*, the series as a whole participates in the myth of the absolute film. One of the central aspirations of the avant-garde film has been the creation of an ultimate work: this aspiration has moved in two directions—toward purification, a reduction to the essence of cinema, and toward giant, all-inclusive forms. Both forms of absolutism can be traced through Brakhage's statements on his work. He has never addressed himself to a definition of the essence of his medium—although tautological references to the materials occur in most of his mature work—but he has referred to several of his shorter films at the time of release as "the most perfect" he has ever made.

Songs began with the film-maker's attempt to move away from monumental forms and from the commitment to a single work over a number of years. It grew into a work longer than *The Art of Vision* and much

more diverse in its materials. *Songs* presents an alternative to *The Art of Vision*; both have their origin in a concept of "dailiness" which Brakhage derived from his reading of Gertrude Stein; one approaches an epic of dailiness through organized mythopoeia, the other through a series of interrelated forms (fragments, essays, portraits, odes). In 1960 Brakhage presented a foundation with a project for "the dailiness film." The grant was rejected. In the synopsis printed in the chapter "State Meant" of *Metaphors on Vision* both long films have their roots. It begins:

> I am planning a feature-length film in which those commonplace daily activities which my wife and child and I share in some form or other with almost every family on earth are visually explored to the fullest extent of their universal meaning.
>
> Having launched the ship of "the dailiness film." the title with which I refer to the inspiration for this project, I can only exemplify certain possible developments for such a beginning [referring to possible images he had described], as it is essential to the integrity of such a project that its individual scenes arise out of the daily activities of our living and that these developing fragments inspired in the immediacy of life direct the form of the entire work. In the Mallarméan sense, the shadow between the white waves of these stapled pages is a better "hull" for the ship of the "dailiness film" than any number of words here written, for each state of this film must be realized in the drama of our living and visualized in the creative act, not predetermined by the literary form of this appeal.[27]

The years spanned by the making of *Songs* saw a number of collective morphological developments in the American avant-garde cinema that are reflected within the encyclopedic form of that work. In the first place, the film diary began to emerge as a significant form during this period, which will be more fully discussed in Chapter eleven. Its origins can be traced back to Marie Menken's *Notebook* and several films of Cornell (and indeed to Cornell's attitude toward film-making as an extremely personal experience), with which both Brakhage and Jonas Mekas, the American avant-garde cinema's major diarist, were very familiar.

The first series of film portraits was made by Andy Warhol in 1964 and 1965 (*Henry Geldzahler, 13 Most Beautiful Women, 13 Most Beautiful Boys*). Between 1964 and 1966 he made two long series of four-minute portraits united by the title *50 Fantastics and 50 Personalities*. Independent of Warhol (although sometimes aggressively antagonistic toward his work), Brakhage began the *XV Song Traits* in 1965. The next year Gregory Markopoulos presented his first portrait collection, *Galaxie*. Subsequently he has made *Political Portraits* (1969) and several uncollected portraits.

It is particularly surprising to find a version of the structural film (see Chapter twelve) within the *Songs*. The first part of *Song XXVII: My Mountain* suspends the film-maker's usual reliance on montage, metaphor, and dynamic rhythm to concentrate on a single view. This happened at the same time as George Landow, Michael Snow, and several others were employing similar strategies, but out of very different aesthetic promptings. And there were similar preoccupations in the work of Gregory Markopoulos (*Gammelion*, 1968) and Bruce Baillie at this time.

In *Quixote* Baillie had brought his lyrical cinema to the threshold of epic and mythopoeia. Although it seemed at that time that, like most of the major avant-gardists, he would plunge into an extended mythopoeic work, he resisted that drive, making instead his late lyrical and structural films, *Tung, Castro Street, All My Life, Still Life*, and *Valentin de las Sierras*. In 1967 he began an almost fatal bout with hepatitis which he recorded in his most ambitious film, *Quick Billy* (1971), a four-part, hour-long essay in mythopoeia and autobiography. He presented the following note with the film at its New York premiere at the Whitney Museum of American Art:

> The essential experience of transformation, between Life and Death, death and birth, or rebirth. In four reels, the first three adapted from the *Bardo Thodol, The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. The fourth reel is in the form of a black and white one-reeler Western, summarizing the material of the first three reels, which are color and abstract.
>
> The work incorporates a large body of material dreams, the daily recording roll by roll of that extraordinary period of the filmmaker's life, "the moment by moment confrontation with Reality," (Carl Jung, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*). Each phase of the work was given its own time to develop, stretching over a period of 3½ years.
>
> "The rolls," silent 3 minute rolls of films that came after the film itself, like artifacts from the descending layers of an archaeological dig . . . numbered 41, 43, 46, and 47. Aesthetically complete, thus included (rent free option) as part of the total work. Reel 4 conceived by Paul Tulley, Charlotte Todd, and myself, with Debby Porter, Bob Treadwell and Kiro Tulley. Music by John Adams, titles by Bob Ross.
>
> The "rolls" took the form of a correspondence, or theatre, between their author and Stan Brakhage, in the winter of 1968–69.[28]

Baillie's deepest debt to Brakhage, however, is not the encouraging letters he wrote in response to the four epilogue reels, which he saw out of context; it is rather to the opening of *Prelude: Dog Star Man* and to the whole of *Part Three* of that film.[29] The whole first three reels of *Quick*

Billy hover on the edge of consciousness, mixing, blurring, and masking images so that they are rarely definable, even though within its own range of textures the film proceeds from the abstract to the relatively concrete and specific before leaping into the ironic narrative of the fourth reel. *Dog Star Man* had elaborated the possibilities of different densities of superimposition. Baillie's contribution to this rhetoric, which is particularly effective in the three areas of his concentration, the evocation of natal, thanatotic, and erotic consciousness, comes from his application of the processes of *Castro Street* to the materials of *Quick Billy*. He mixes his own superimpositions with complex masking, while Brakhage had worked in simple additive units (two to four layers). Furthermore, Baillie reinforces his visual mesh with an equally subtle fusion of natural noises, voice, and artificially altered sounds on the soundtrack.

Baillie has written, "All of the film was recorded next to the Pacific Ocean in Fort Bragg, California, from dreams and daily life there; all of it given its own good *time* to evolve and become clear to me. The sea is the main force through the film. 'Prentice to the Sea!' was something I wrote to myself in those days."

Like the different kinds of cinematic objects within Brakhage's *Songs*, the successive styles of Baillie's epic, represented by the first three reels, the fourth reel, and the "rolls" separately, define boundaries of visual experience—the oneiric and intellectual, the narrative and parodic, the immediate and retinal—but in their quest for origins, which Baillie associates, in his thirty volumes of notes and diaries relating to the film (in the Anthology Film Archives), with the "loss of innocence," he attempted to incorporate within the film the temporality of its creation, which Brakhage, in the simple chronology of his pieces, avoided. Later, making *Scenes from Under Childhood*, he began to take it into consideration. In his letter to Baillie about the last two "rolls" (46, 47), he describes the process in its full complexity, although he did not know at the time that the whole of Baillie's film would not be as immediate and unedited as the "rolls":

> Anyway, [*Scenes from Under Childhood*] is close to your work (& now, & from now on, as "in touch" as I am): and one of the most exciting approximations is this involvement with the-sceen-*as-photographed*, relatively free of Edit's Intellect and/or the SUPERimposition of the process of memory upon each instant of living: you, as I, seem to be taking strong advatage of *film's most unique possibility—preservation of the track of light* in the field of vision (thus the each move of the visionary) at the/each instant of photographing: I now find myself solidly See-er of my photography, rather than Editor thereOF it: but this inspiration—in the work process—exists in the incredible tension of my feeling an equal need to let Memory COLOR each unedited light track . . . via "B" and "C" rolls generally . . . and SHAPE both objects and spaces . . . by way of compounding

> pics./spaces, rather than superimposing upon them—again BC stuffing mostly: sometimes I even compress, by additives; and I do, then, tremble on the edge of superimposition: and, let's face it, sometimes I still just-plain-superimpose, as always, also: but the general DRIVE is one in honor of *the moment of photography*, so that there's very little shifting of the orders of shots within a sequence, and very little cutting of lengths of shot either. Actually, I've worked (more sub-consciously) in this area of direction many times before ("Desist-film"—THAT far back—"Daybreak & Whiteye," "Films by S. B.," the "T.V. Concretes," many "Songs" and many sequences of "Scenes From Under Childhood," Sec. #1): and it's coming to seem to me that "Scenes From Under Childhood" on its primary visual level IS a track of the evolution of SIGHT: thus its images flash out of blanks of color, thru fantastic distorts/twists of forms and orders (those fantasies wherein one *imagines* oneself: even suggesting those "pre-natal fantasies" wherein Freud, to his despair, finally found that unanalysable nest hatching all basic neuroses), space/shape absolutely *dominated by the rhythms of inner physiology*, then shaking like jellied masses at first encounters with outers, the beginning of The Dance, shattering OUT of even memory's grip thru TO some exactitude of sight/light.[30]

His annotations on the entire correspondence relate Brakhage's expressions to his own readings in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*. The words "preservation" and "inner physiology" touch upon the central themes of *Quick Billy*, although Brakhage could not have known it from the fragments he saw.

In the notebooks, Baillie once summarized the first three reels in eleven sections:

> I. Loss. II. The Beast III. Protection IV. cont. passage V. schism VI. White Goddess VII. Male-Female Embrace VIII. High School Heroes. IX. Wrathful Deity/ Judgment X. Protecting Environment (birth?) XI. Sea/The Father (Intelligence).

Yet even with the aid of this synopsis, and more detailed subheadings, I cannot isolate all the parts of the film. The imagery is often so abstracted, and the elision of sections so smooth, that the whole film seems like a pulsating matrix, at first alternating between a consciousness of birth and one of death, and later letting emerge, sometimes very briefly, the dream-like, anamorphic image of a beckoning female (perhaps the White Goddess), or evoking in sound and pictures physical lovemaking; and then pausing meditatively over pictures from an album in which photographs of a high school basketball team predominate.

All through the film are woven images of the sea, trees, animals—including the fearful symmetry of a dream-like tiger—fire, the sun, and the moon. The superimposition with the textural masking blends these images together and often keeps them at the threshold of recognition, as I have said; it also creates mutations of form and color which give an aspect of the monstrous to the imagery. Baillie originally planned to call the film *Feetfear*. He told Richard Whitehall:

> It's a name came to me in a series of dreams, and the film will try to film those dreams I've had. There's a whole mythology of my own grown out of there, and this is probably due to the craziness from hepatitis. This chemical change in the brain operation. It's a little like being high on a small amount of LSD. And I went up into the woods of Oregon and I was terrified. The blackness. And I've had terrifying bestial dreams. They work their way out into a lovelier meeting with Diana, the protectress of men in the woods. I wrote them all down in detail, and I don't know exactly what I'm going to work with, what I'm going to photograph. Using Kodachrome because it's easy to keep it dark and non-grainy around the edges when you're working in a low-level light. It would almost be more effective in animation. It's really the edges of shadows and colors and working in a totally abstract way, and somehow realizing animal shapes out of it—almost the way one would impose an animated figure into a photographed frame. The way Alexieff does it in *Night on Bare Mountain*. In a way it grows out of the things that have been very close to me over the past few months, a form of death. Using the real animals as well as their shapes. Symbols. The word "symbol" is kind of hard to use. But it really is symbols.[31]

In the same synopsis that I quoted, he tries to define the title *Feetfear* by placing next to it the expression, "Fear of leaving the beast/loss of innocence—'confronted by Reality.' " At that time he reserved the title *Quick Billy* for the ironic fourth reel.

That parody, "set in Kansas in 1863," describes in ribald gags the arrival of an uncouth cowboy, played by the film-maker, who takes over a Kansas farmhouse. His drunkenness and his rape of the farm girl parody the states of marginal consciousness and the powerful erotic episode in the earlier part, where Baillie worked with close-up and colored images of the male and female body in a direct descent from *Part Three: Dog Star Man*.

Baillie offers a cinematic and a literary analogy to the "rolls" in the notebooks; they are "like chambers (episodes: e.g., Cocteau's hotel, or Steppenwolf's magic theater)." They not only represent an early temporal stratum in the composition of the film, they also locate in magical visions,

according to the analogies, the origins of the film, fix the place where it was shot, show a prop for the fourth reel in its presence outside of the narrative, define the space of a breakfast scene that the film-maker had earlier described on the sound track. Thus, in one of the rolls the startling face of the nearly dying film-maker, which Brakhage accurately described to him as staring into the camera as if into a mirror, identifies the maker, whom we see otherwise in extreme body close-ups or in the cowboy *persona*. In another, a giant Uncle Sam prop which had been used in the black-and-white fourth reel moves along the seascape, which appears for the first time without distortion, uniting the two earlier sections of the film. Finally, the slow pan around the kitchen shows the cabin where most of the film was made and recalls in the silent images of an empty room the breakfast, described in the longest passage of talk in the first three reels, of "hot pancakes and eggs and fresh bread and tea and honey" as they "sat in front of the window and watched the sea, where I shot all the film."

Baillie insists that *Quick Billy* be shown on a single projector, so that a pause would ensue between each of the reel changes. With the addition of the four "rolls," he then simultaneously returns his film from its temporal cross-references to its origins in an affirmation of "the moment of photography," and he reminds his audience that they are in front of a film, awaiting the change of reels. The first three reels had moved at once forward toward death and backward to adolescence and birth. In the fourth reel an arbitrary date in the past, 1863, began the film, and a projection into the future, the title "Ever Westward Eternal Rider!" ended it. After those allusions to temporal cycles, he rests on "film's most unique possibility—preservation of the track of light in the field of vision."

eight

Absolute Animation

NOT ALL AVANT-GARDE film-making of the late 1950s utilized the trance form and psycho-drama. The graphic cinema offered a vital alternative to the subjective. This polarity (and the potential for its convergence) extends back to the origins of the avant-garde film in Europe in the 1920s. Through the examples of *Un Chien Andalou, Le Sang d'un Poète*, and *Entr'Acte*, a continuity has been suggested between the Surrealist and Dada cinema and the works of Maya Deren and Sidney Peterson. Another wing of the Dadaist cinema fused with filmic Cubism and Neoplasticism to produce films of equally major significance. In the 1920s the spectrum extending from Surrealism to Cubism in the cinema was continuous. But with the renaissance of independent film-making in America during and just after the Second World War, graphic and subjective film-making ideologically diverged and remained apart until their slow reconciliation in the early 1960s.

Hans Richter's *Rhythmus* 21 (1921), Viking Eggeling's *Symphonie Diagonale* (1921), Marcel Duchamp's *Anémic*

Cinéma (1927), and Fernand Léger's *Ballet Mécanique* (1924) constitute the central works of the initial graphic cinema, and they span the scope of its variations.

Richter, who had been a painter and scroll-maker, took the primal conditions of black and white and the rectangular shape of the screen as the essential elements of his film. In sweeping movements which begin in the center of the screen and move out horizontally or vertically, the flat black space becomes white or vice versa. Within this matrix of fluctuating negative and positive space, white, gray, and black squares emerge from and recede into an illusory depth of the screen in a rhythmic pattern that grows increasingly more intricate until its sudden and short reversal to the elements of the black-and-white screen at the very end of the film.

Eggeling worked with Richter, and like him the urge to make films came from a desire to extend his work on scrolls into time. In his film *Symphonie Diagonale*, figures move along alternative diagonal lines crossing the screen from upper left to lower right and from upper right to lower left. At the same time they seem to move in depth from the surface of the screen to an imaginary receding point at its center, as Richter's squares had, and back again. Finally, Eggeling's shapes evolve in straight and elaborately curved lines while they pursue their diagonal and emerging-receding movements. The musicality of *Symphonie Diagonale* comes from its exhaustive use of reciprocal movements. An elaboration along one diagonal axis is mirrored immediately along the other; the growth at one end of a figure is matched by its disunion at another end; a movement into the screen precedes one out of it.

In *Anémic Cinéma*, Duchamp alternates head-on views of his illusion-producing roto-reliefs with similarly turned discs of words, elaborate French puns printed spirally, creating a fluctuation of illusory depth within a very narrow spectrum (from the slightly convex or slightly concave illusions) to the flat readings. In this, his only film, Duchamp typically crystallized the significance of the graphic film. By virtue of its inheritance from still photography, the representation of space in depth comes naturally to the cinema, and the first films exploited it gloriously. The graphic filmmaker deliberately rejected the illusion of depth built into the camera's lenses.[1] He set out to re-establish virtual depth by manipulating the scale of flat plastic shapes (Richter and Eggeling), through the presenting and unmasking of simple optical illusions (Duchamp), and lastly with the obliteration of accustomed depth while retaining the traditional photographic images (as we shall see in various strategies of Léger).

The Surrealist cinema largely disappeared after Buñuel's *L'Age d'Or* (1930) to re-emerge thirteen years later in America, essentially transformed. The graphic cinema, on the other hand, continued its evolution with diminished force throughout the 1930s and 1940s. The coming of sound to film inspired several attempts to visualize music through cinematic abstractions and to synchronize visual rhythms to music.

The central figure in the transition from the European to the American graphic film was Len Lye.[2] A New Zealander, Lye became intrigued with the kinetic possibilities of art when he was an adolescent, as he elaborates in an interview in *Film Culture* 29:

> I had read that Constable had tried to paint clouds in motion and the Dadaists were experimenting with motion painting also. I had a paper route at that time, so I used to get up early and go off for a walk and try to sort out things about art. Then it hit me as I was looking at those darn sunrises, lit up clouds, why try to simulate motion in paintings of clouds or in after-image effects? Why not just do something that literally made movement?

Early in the 1920s he went to Australia to learn cartoon animation, but he did not make his first film until he moved to London in 1928. There he made *Tusalava* (Samoan for "things go full circle"), a black-and-white film combining his fascination with movement with the imagery of South Pacific primitive art, a life-long interest. Yet cartoon animation has played a very small part in Lye's most important contributions to the graphic cinema. In fact, in the act of rejecting cartoon procedures, with which films such as Richter's and Eggeling's had been made, he became the first film-maker to paint directly on top of film stock, thus shortcutting the photographic process. Although *Colour Box* (1935) was the first result of this direct method, Lye's experiments in hand-painting film go back to Australia and the mid-1920s.

The direct application of paint to the surface of film transformed the dynamics of the graphic film. Color could be rendered more vivid than it could by the photographic process; the different kinds and densities of paint opened a range of texture hitherto ignored; and above all the problems of shape, scale, and the illusions of perspective which the early graphic film-makers inherited from the painterly and photographic traditions could be bracketed by an imagery that remained flat on the plane of the screen and avoided geometrical contour.

In *Colour Box*, a wavy, vertical line multiplies itself and interacts with circles and fields of dots against a background washed with paint. Although Lye avoids all indications of screen depth by having no movement into or out of the vanishing point, the lines and circles seem to move in front of the unshaped background paint, and both seem recessed slightly when stenciled letters, telling us to use parcel post, appear near the end and affirm a plane even closer to the literal screen than the painted plane. This use of block lettering recalls the similar employment of stencils in analytical cubism.

Apparently Lye was more interested in expanding a vocabulary of dynamic visual forms than in exploring the implications and possibilities of

a cinema without photography; for in his next film, *Kaleidoscope* (1936) hand-painting becomes less important than stenciling. Dots, complex patterns, circles, lines, and arabesques crisscross the screen in muted colors. Again the shapes and colors hug the surface of the screen with no indications of depth other than the shallow superimposition of some forms as they pass over one another.

Lye never completely abandoned working with the raw surface of unphotographed film, but his evolution as a film-maker did not occur along the lines initiated by this startling invention. In *Rainbow Dance* and *Trade Tattoo* (both 1936), he combined some of his surface techniques with photographed images of actuality. Although his reputation has been sustained by the invention of direct painting on film, Lye deserves equal credit as one of the great masters of montage. His specialty has been the jump-cut, an elliptical condensation of action achieved by eliminating middle shots so that the figure on the screen seems to jump forward along a prescribed course of action.

Along with the combination of elliptically edited scenes of elementary actions and surface lines, dots, and shapes, Lye began to develop techniques of color separation. Through an intricate process of masking and combining negative and positive images in the printing laboratory, Lye could make one figure in a photographed scene assume one pure color and another figure in that same originally black-and-white shot take on a different color. In doing so he achieved a strength of color his first films lacked, but only unhampered paint on film could create the lost textural range of the surface.

In his later works Lye moved away from both color and the synthesis of techniques. *Rhythm* (1953) shows the assembly of a Ford in one minute of hundreds of jump-cuts. The film is black-and-white without any abstract surface texture save white holes punched out of the opening and ending shots of the exterior of the Ford plant. Having created a film purely exploiting the jump-cut, he made another working only with the surface of unphotographed film. This time he scratched ideographic lines on black film stock. *Free Radicals* (1958) reduces and distills the dynamics of the hand-made film to a primitive kinetic dance of white lines and angles. The jaggedness of these meticulously executed scratches in an indexical evocation of the concentrated energy required to etch them onto film. The film-maker has described the quality of the movement as "spastic." Of his working method he has said:

> If I couldn't complete the etched line by forcing the needle to complete the design on the film, then the continuity of a dozen or so designs which preceded it would be lost. So, I wriggled my whole body to get a compressed feeling into my shoulders—trying to get a pent-up feeling of inexorable precision into the fingers of both hands which grasped the needle and, with a sudden

jump, pulled the needle through the celluloid and completed my design.[3]

When in the early 1940s Harry Smith made his first hand-painted films, he was unaware that the concept was not original with him; such is his claim, which the author believes. To the historian of cinema it would make little difference if Smith acted by invention or imitation, for his reputation is not bound to any proof of priority. The hand-painted films with which he began his career as a film-maker are the most remarkable ever achieved in that technique; and his subsequent films, both animated and photographed from actuality, sustain his stature as one of the central film-makers of the avant-garde tradition.

With characteristic self-irony and hermetic allusions, he composed the following notes on his work for the catalogue of the Film-Makers' Co-operative:

> My cinematic excreta is of four varieties:—batiked abstractions made directly on film between 1939 and 1946; optically printed non-objective studies composed around 1950; semi-realistic animated collages made as part of my alchemical labors of 1957 to 1962; and chronologically superimposed photographs of actualities formed since the latter year. All these works have been organized in specific patterns derived from the interlocking beats of the respiration, the heart and the EEG Alpha component and should be observed together in order, or not at all, for they are valuable works, works that will live forever—they made me gray.
>
> no. 1: Hand-drawn animation of dirty shapes—the history of the geologic period reduced to orgasm length. (Approx. 5 min.)
>
> no. 2: Batiked animation, etc. etc. The action takes place either inside the sun or in Zurich, Switzerland. (Approx. 10 min.)
>
> no. 3: Batiked animation made of dead squares, the most complex hand-drawn film imaginable. (Approx. 10 min.)
>
> no. 4: Black-and-white abstractions of dots and grillworks made in a single night. (Approx. 6 min.)
>
> no. 5: Color abstraction. Homage to Oscar Fischinger—a sequel to No. 4. (Approx. 6 min.)
>
> no. 6: Three-dimensional, optically printed, abstraction using glasses the color of Heaven & Earth. (Approx. 20 min.)
>
> no. 7: Optically printed Pythagoreanism in four movements supported on squares, circles, grillworks and triangles with an interlude concerning an experiment. (Approx. 15 min.)

no. 8: Black-and-white collage made up of clippings from 19th Century ladies' wear catalogues and elocution books. The cat, the dog, the statue and the Hygrometer appear here for the first time. (Approx. 5 min.)

no. 9: Color collage of biology books and 19th Century temperance posters. An attempt to reconstruct Capt. Cook's Tapa collection. (Approx. 10 min.)

no. 10: An exposition of Buddhism and the Kaballa in the form of a collage. The final scene shows Aquatic mushrooms (not in No. 11) growing on the moon while the Hero and Heroine row by on a cerebrum. (Approx. 10 min.)

no. 11: A commentary on and exposition of No. 10 synchronized to Monk's "Mysterioso." A famous film—available sooner or later from Cinema 16. (Approx. 4 min.)

no. 12: A much expanded version of No. 8. The first part depicts the heroine's toothache consequent to the loss of a very valuable watermelon, her dentistry and transportation to heaven. Next follows an elaborate exposition of the heavenly land in terms of Israel, Montreal and the second part depicts the return to earth from being eaten by Max Muller on the day Edward the Seventh dedicated the Great Sewer of London. (Approx. 50 min.)

no. 13: Fragments and tests of Shamanism in the guise of a children's story. This film, made with van Wolf, is perhaps the most expensive animated film ever made—the cost running well over ten thousand dollars a minute—wide screen, stereophonic sound of the ballet music from Faust. Production was halted when a major investor (H. P.) was found dead under embarrassing conditions. (Approx. 3 hours)

no. 14: Superimposed photography of Mr. Fleischman's butcher shop in New York, and the Kiowa around Anadarko, Oklahoma—with Cognate Material. The strip is dark at the beginning and end, light in the middle, and is structured 122333221. I honor it the most of my films, otherwise a not very popular one before 1972. If the exciter lamp blows, play Bert Brecht's "Mahagonny." (Approx. 25 min.)

For those who are interested in such things: Nos. 1 to 5 were made under pot; No. 6 with schmeck (it made the sun shine) and ups; No. 7 with cocaine and ups; Nos. 8 to 12 with almost anything, but mainly deprivation, and 13 with green pills from Max Jacobson, pink pills from Tim Leary, and vodka; No. 14 with vodka and Italian Swiss white port.[4]

The continuity of Harry Smith's cinema is remarkable, all the more so because of its variety. The shifts in technique and the swerves in intention of each new film seem grounded in the principles of the previous film. After the initial attempt at a freely drawn hand-painted film (*No.* 1), he made two progressively more complex, batiked, geometrical animations (*Nos.* 2 and 3), colored by spray paint and dyes, also directly applied to the film. Then he began a series of photographed abstractions, first in black-and-white (*No.* 4), then in color (*Nos.* 5 and 7), with quantum leaps of intricacy at each stage. *Nos.* 10 and 11 integrate collage and fragmentary animated narrative into the spatial and color fields established in the earlier films. That narrative tendency expanded in *No.* 12 and would have reached an even greater elaboration had No. 13 been completed according to his plan. With the abandonment of that film, Smith turned from animation to the actual world for his imagery, but he maintained a plastic control over what he filmed by means of superimposition (*No.* 14) and the use of a kaleidoscope (*The Tin Woodsman's Dream*, second part).

The regular curve of this progression, describing in its course several versions of hermeticism from Neo-Platonic formalism through ritual magic to shamanism traces a graph of evolving concerns and reveals an amazing patience, at odds with the language but not the sense of the film-maker's comments on his work. Harry Smith was a practicing hermeticist. As much as his films share the central concerns of the American avant-garde cinema and incarnate its historical development, they separate themselves and demand attention as aspects of Smith's other work. He divided his time among film-making, painting (less in recent years), iconology (he had a formidable collection of Ukrainian Easter eggs and had spent years practicing Northwest Indian string figures in preparation for books on these symbolic cosmologies), music (his reputation as an authority on folk music matches his reputation as a film-maker among experts), anthropology (Folkways issued his recordings and notes on the peyote ritual of the Kiowa), and linguistics (as an amateur, but with intense interest).

Since childhood Smith sustained an interest in the occult and in the machinery of illusionism:

> My father gave me a blacksmith shop when I was maybe twelve; he told me I should convert lead into gold. He had me build all these things like models of the first Bell telephone, the original electric light bulb, and perform all sorts of historical experiments. . . . Very early my parents got me interested in projecting things.[5]

His father also initiated his interest in drawing by teaching him to make a geometrical representation of the Cabalistic tree of life. Smith even spoke of Giordano Bruno as the inventor of the cinema in an hilariously aggressive lecture at Yale in 1965, quoting the thesis of *De Immenso, Innumerabilibus et Infigurabilibus* that there are an infinite number of universes,

each possessing a similar world with some slight differences—a hand raised in one, lowered in another—so that the perception of motion is an act of the mind swiftly choosing a course among an infinite number of these "freeze frames," and thereby animating them. We see that Smith regards his work in the historical tradition of magical illusionism, extending at least back to Robert Fludd who used mirrors to animate books, and Athanasius Kircher who cast spells with a magic lantern.

In an interview in the *Village Voice*, he offered the following unexpected evaluation of his work as a film-maker among film-makers.

> I think I'm the third best film producer in the country. I think Andy Warhol is the best. Kenneth Anger is the second best. And now I've decided I'm the third best. There was a question in my mind whether Brakhage or myself was the third best, but now I think I am.[6]

The smoothness of the diachronic outline of Smith's development as a film-maker reflects the ease with which the formal and the hermetic poles meet in any given film along that graph. In the ensemble of his work, neoplasticism converges with Surrealism so undramatically that we are forced to see that the distances among the theosophy of suprematism, the Neoplatonism of Kandinsky and Mondrian, and the alchemical and Cabalistic metaphysics of Surrealism were not as great as among their respective spatial and tropic strategies. Harry Smith already occupied the new theoretical center where neoplasticism and Surrealism might converge.

The hermetic artist is one who finds the purification, or the formal reduction, of his art coincident with his quest for a magical center that all arts, and all consciousnesses, share. The paradox of hermetic cinema which we encounter in the later films of both Kenneth Anger and Harry Smith is that the closer it comes to self-definition the further it moves from autonomy, the more it seems to involve itself in allusion, arcane reference, obscurity. While most of his contemporaries found first the dream and then the myth to be the prime metaphors for cinema's essence, Smith, following the same path, posited a moving geometry as its essence before he joined the others in a move to mythopoeia.

He defined the geometry of cinema in terms of its potential for complexity rather than reduction to simplicity. His early films are progressively more intricate. Yet his first film is remarkably sophisticated in its range of tactics.

No. 1, the most eccentric of Harry Smith's animations, utilizes a principle of imbalance and unpredictability as a source of visual tension, which is reflected in several aspects of the film's imagery and form. Its freely drawn, Arp-like figures resist precise geometry, and the base itself, when it becomes solid, has a tendency to leave a band of a different color at the right edge of the screen. Hard-edged squares are integrated rather uneasily into this context of fluctuation and eccentricity. A vibration occurs when

they appear at the beginning, in the middle, and just before the conclusion of the film.

Positions and colors alternate quickly, jumping within the frame, as two squares move toward each other along a virtual diagonal, as in Eggeling's film. Shapes change as soon as they are formed; amorphous circles turn into squares which open up to contain circles again. Only the original hard-edged squares resist transformation as they fall again in the middle of the film.

The instability of the base, which changes color, becomes texturally settled, and can dissolve into splatterings, reflects the ambiguity of the outlined forms which occasionally transform outside to inside. The film-maker's reference to "dirty shapes" in this film must refer to the vaguely phallic wedge in the middle of the film, which becomes a triangle with a hole through which a circle and a soft, again somewhat phallic, rectangle pass. Once the ground turns into the figure in the manner of Richter's *Rhythmus* 21: a horizontal band expands in both directions, but before it wipes the previous base away it bends upon itself as if to become a new circle. As the outer shell dissolves, circles form within circles until the distinction between a circle and a square weakens. Four soft triangles, with holes in them, come together to suggest a rectangle. In the final appearance of the rigid squares, they again overlap to create a negative space, and they make the most complex set of variations in the film.

The difficulty of adequately describing No. 1 reflects the excessive instability of its imagery. Changes continually occur on at least two levels, that of figure and that of base; there are often two or more simultaneous developments on both levels, with perhaps one point of synchronization between one figural and one base change, while all else is asynchronous. This instability, which always seems about to resolve itself on the level of the figure, actually finds its satisfying conclusion, its unexpected *telos*, in the two flashes, first eight frames long, then eleven, of the irregular yellow and red shape—the chromatic climax of the film—just before the end.

In *Nos.* 2 and 3 Harry Smith abandoned the hand-drawn figure. He concentrated on the exhaustive use of the batiking principle by which he inserted the hard-edged squares into his first film. As he describes it in an interview in *Film Culture Reader*, that process involved placing "come clean" dots on 35mm film, spraying color on it, then covering the strip with vaseline before removing the dots. Another spraying will give two colors, one inside and one outside the circle. Of course the process can be multiplied with different colors.

This shift of technique implied a new dynamics for the films. In *No.* 1 the film-maker recognized the essential instability of a drawn line which has to repeat itself twenty-four times a second. He elaborated the whole form of his film out of this basic instability, exaggerating it and mimicking it in structural and textural ways. The batiking process removed the essential vibration of line. Smith responded to this fact with more rigorous rhythmic form, a heightened centrality of imagery, a smoother balance of

colors, and a strict reliance on basic geometrical figures. In *No.* 2 in particular he explored the use of offscreen space implicit in the opening and in several moments of *No.* 1. By opening with and predominantly using motion from the top to the bottom of the screen, he introduced a sense of gravity around which the offscreen vectors are organized.

Several variations on the manifestation and rhythmic movement of the circle alternate through the film: (1) a circle defines itself out of the widening of a section by the expanding of two radii or disappears by inversion; (2) one circle or a phalanx of circles crosses the screen vertically or horizontally; (3) a circle collapses from its circumference inward or expands outward as far as or beyond the rectangle of the screen; (4) a circle splits into two semicircles to reveal another circle behind it; (5) fixed concentric circles; (6) a small circle turns within a larger one with a continual tangency of circumferences.

The reliance on primary colors emphasizes the purity and regularity of the film's form. By making this directly on film with the batiked process rather than animating it from drawings as is possible, Harry Smith maintained the vibrancy of directly applied color with its frame-by-frame fluctuations which otherwise would be lost. There is also a minimum of arbitrary blending and/or an absence of color at the points where the circles meet the base. This and a discreet amount of flaking, especially on the inlaid squares, give the film a textural immediacy. With the geometric regularity of the circles and the structural regularity of the film's construction, Smith has created a form in opposition to the color's irregularity. The result is more successful than the opposite tactic employed in *No.* 1.

When Smith says that "the action takes place either inside the sun or in Zurich, Switzerland," he is alluding to the hermetic source of the circle, the sun, and suggesting that the film might also take place in the mind of Carl Jung, then living in Zurich. His subsequent claim that *No.* 3 is the most complex hand-painted film ever made is sustained by its comparison with anything I have seen in this mode. The most ambitious aspects of *No.* 1 and 2 are merely preludes to the textural, rhythmic, and structural complexity of *No.* 3. It is not difficult to believe the film-maker when he says that it took him several years of daily work to complete it.

It falls into three sections. In the first a hatch made of four bars (two horizontal, two vertical, crossed over each other like a grid for playing tic-tac-toe) gradually turns into a field of squares, which in turn reveal a group of overlapping diamonds which are central to the second section. There the diamonds undergo a number of changes amid expanding rectangles (characteristic of the first part of the film) and circles (characteristic of the last part). The final third uses the image of the expanding circle to mount a spectacular climax integrating the previous strategies and images of the film.

This time the film-maker makes little use of offscreen space; he organizes much of the movement within the film in terms of the illusionary depth

of the screen. Images recede into and explode out of a deep center. Emphasis is placed on the relative positions of foreground and background figures. The changes of color are more complex than in *No.* 2; solid hues rest beside clearly defined areas of splattered paint and when figures overlap their common areas take on different colors. Finally, different rhythmic structures mesh with a complexity equal to the most elaborate achievements of the entire graphic film tradition.

By the time he completed this film, Harry Smith had established contacts with other film-makers, both in the San Francisco area where he was working and in Los Angeles. It was at the same time that Frank Stauffacher and Richard Foster founded Art in Cinema, where avant-garde films, both those from the Europe of two decades earlier and new works, had their first rigorous screenings on the American West Coast. Although Smith continued to paint throughout this period, he came to identify himself with the emerging cinema. In fact, when Stauffacher and Foster split up and it looked as if Art in Cinema would fail (as it did), he tried for a brief time to program new films for it. It is nearly impossible to pin Smith down on specific dates within this period of the late 1940s and equally difficult to fix his movements precisely from other sources. Nevertheless we know that he worked in San Francisco and Berkeley during this time and that during this period he met John and James Whitney of Los Angeles, who were to have a decisive influence on him and later on Jordan Belson.

Between 1943 and 1944 the Whitney brothers had made *Five Film Exercises* on home-made animating and sound composing equipment. One of their highest ambitions was to produce "audio-visual music" or "color music" by the synchronization of abstract transformations to electronic sounds and by the utilization of basically musical forms for the overall construction of their films. In one article of 1944, they refer to Bauer, a source of inspiration they shared with Smith; in another, of 1945, they speak of Mondrian and Duchamp (in so far as he urged mechanical reproduction over hand-made objects of art) as primary inspirations. Their early films show hard-edged or sometimes slightly out of focus figures in a state of continual transformation and movement about the screen. A shape that seems to curve three-dimensionally will change to make its flatness apparent (*Film Exercise* 1); the whole screen or half the screen will flash with color flickers (*Film Exercise* 2 and 3); and behind geometrical variations; a reciprocal play of movement into and out of screen depth will structure a film (*Film Exercise* 4); or a process of echo and recapitulation in different colors will be an organizing principle (*Film Exercise* 5). Their own notes for the catalogue of Art in Cinema most clearly define their aspirations:

> FIRST SOUND FILM; COMPLETED FALL 1943
>
> Begins with a three beat announcement, drawn out in time,
> which thereafter serves as an imageless transition figure dividing

the sections of the film. Each new return of this figure is condensed more and more in time. Finally it is used in reverse to conclude the film . . .

This film was produced entirely by manipulation of paper cut-outs and shot at regular motion picture camera speed instead of hand animating one frame at a time. The entire film, two hundred feet in length, was constructed from an economical twelve feet of original image material.

FRAGMENTS; SPRING 1944

These two very short fragments were also made from paper cut-outs. At this time we were developing a means of controlling this procedure with the use of pantographs. While we were satisfied with the correlation of sound and image, progress with the material had begun to lag far behind our ideas. These two were left unfinished in order to begin the films which follow.

FOURTH FILM; COMPLETED SPRING 1944

Entire film divided into four consecutive chosen approaches, the fourth being a section partially devoted to a reiteration and extension of the material of the first and second sections.

SECTION ONE: Movement used primarily to achieve spatial depth. An attempt is made to delay sound in a proportional relationship to the depth or distance of its corresponding image in the screen space. That is, a near image is heard sooner than one in the distance. Having determined the distant and near extremes of the visual image, this screen space is assigned a tonal interval. The sound then moves along a melodic line in continuous glissando back and forth slowing down as it approaches its point of alternation direction . . .

SECTION TWO: Consists of four short subjects in natural sequence. They are treated to a development in terms alternately of contraction and expansion or halving and doubling of their rhythm. Sound and visual elements held in strict synchronization. . . .

SECTION THREE: A fifteen second visual sequence is begun every five seconds after the fashion of canon form in music. This constitutes the leading idea, a development of which is extended into three different repetitions. This section is built upon the establishment of complex tonal masses which oppose complex image masses. The durations of each are progressively shortened. The image masses are progressively simplified and their spatial movement increasingly rapid.

SECTION FOUR: Begins with a statement in sound and image which at its conclusion is inverted and retrogresses to its be-

> ginning. An enlarged repetition of this leads to the reiterative conclusion of the film.
>
> FIFTH FILM; COMPLETED SPRING 1944
>
> Opens with a short canonical statement of a theme upon which the entire film is constructed. Followed by a rhythmical treatment of the beginning and ending images of this theme in alternation. This passage progresses by a quickening of rhythm, increasing in complexity and color fluctuation . . .
>
> A second section begins after a brief pause. Here an attempt is made to pose the same image theme of the first section in deep film screen space. As the ending image recedes after an accented frontal flash onto the screen it unfolds itself repeatedly leaving the receding image to continue on smaller and smaller.[7]

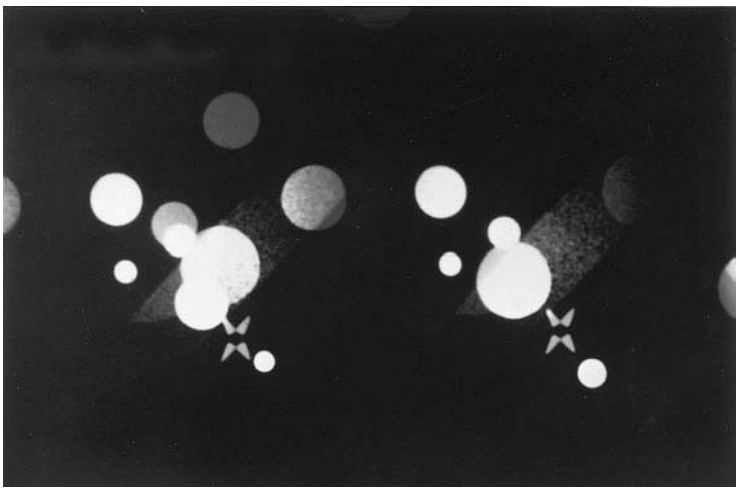
Harry Smith credits the Whitneys both with teaching him the techniques of photographic animation and with helping him to formulate a theoretical view of cinema.

He remained faithful to the circle, the triangle, and the square or rectangle as the essential forms of visual geometry. Before the black-and-white imagery of *No.* 4 begins, Smith pans the camera over a painting of his from the same period. The movements on the painting are in color. In contrast to his film work, the painting uses organic, bulb-like forms rather than rigid geometrical figures. In *Film Culture* he described this painting:

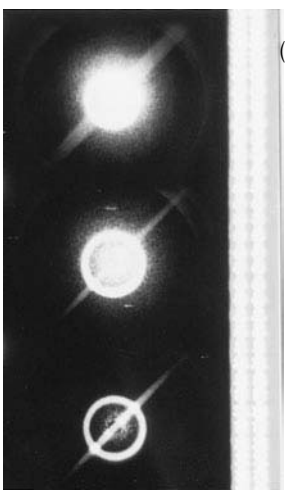
> It is a painting to a tune by Dizzy Gillespie called "Manteca." Each stroke in the painting represents a certain note on the recording. If I had the record, I could project the painting as a slide and point to a certain thing.[8]

The possibility of translating music into images is another part of the hermetic worldview. In practice Harry Smith's use of sound with film has been very problematic. The initial three painted films were made to be shown silently. After they were finished, the film-maker had the following experience: "I had a really great illumination the first time I heard Dizzy Gillespie play. I had gone there very high, and I literally saw all kinds of color flashes. It was at that point that I realized music could be put to my films." He claims that he then cut down *No.* 2 from an original length of over thirty minutes to synchronize it with Gillespie's "Guacha Guero." Neither the original long version nor the synchronized print survive.

Smith was notoriously self-destructive. The loss of several important films from his "Great Work" attests to this. He proved in films like *No.* 11 and *No.* 12 that he could use both music and sound effects meticulously, and in the case of the later film, with genius. His ability in handling sound makes all the more alarming the extreme casualness with which he



(a)



(b)

Geometrical abstraction in (a) Harry Smith's *No. 7* and (b) *No. 5: Circular Tensions*.

put the Beatles' first album with an anthology of his early films, *Early Abstractions*, for distribution. It seems as if he wanted to obscure the monumentality of his achievement in painting and animating film by simply updating the sound track.

No. 4 combines camera movement with superimposition to create a dance of white circles and squares against a black background. Because of the absence of any perspective, the bobbing and swinging of the camera is translated by the eye into a movement of lights within or across the screen. By altering his speed of movement, the distance from the object, and the direction of the camera, he can elaborate a formal interplay of counterpoint, scale change, and off-screen orientation out of a simple grid of twenty-four white squares and a field of circular dots.

No. 5, entitled *Circular Tensions*, extends the use of the moving camera and superimposition into color and geometry. Against a black background a green square appears next to a red circle and triangle. Slowly they begin to move around and over one another. Then an eccentrically composed blue spiral appears dimly in superimposition, giving an illusory depth to the black space behind the geometrical figures. Numerous bright yellow lights sweep across the screen in different directions, leaving in their wake a bounding red circle. Its scale remains constant as the camera zooms in and out on superimposed rectangles.

In the late 1940s Harry Smith and Jordan Belson invited Hilla Rebay of the Museum of Non-Objective Art (now the Guggenheim Museum) to see their paintings when she was in San Francisco. That visit ultimately resulted in a grant from the Solomon Guggenheim Foundation during 1951 for Smith to begin work on *No.* 7. When he moved to New York at the completion of the film, he was again helped by Hilla Rebay and given a studio in the Guggenheim Museum. At that time the Guggenheim Museum specialized in collecting the works of Kandinsky and Bauer. Of all of his films, *No.* 7 comes the closest to animating a painting of Kandinsky in his geometrical style of the 1920s.

To make this film, Smith set up a primitive, back-screen projection situation that worked with astonishing precision. One machine projected black-and-white images on a translucent screen. On the other side of the screen a 16mm camera re-recorded them. A wheel of color filters in front of the camera was used to determine the hue of a figure or a background. By keeping an accurate record of where any pattern was recorded on the film strip, the film-maker could make elaborate synchronous movements by means of several layers of superimposition. Most of the visual tropes of *No.* 7 derive from earlier animations of Smith's; but here they attain their apogee of intricacy and color control. No use is made of offscreen space. Illusory depth orients the entire film, but, unlike the earlier films, there is a tension here between images which have their center of gravity in the absolute center of the screen and sets of images with two or more lateral centers.

The film-maker's note divides the film into four parts. In the first, if my division is accurate, the following tropes are dominant: (1) colored bars appear vertically, horizontally, or diagonally against the background and widen to the edges of the screen until they become the backdrop; (2) rings within rings of the same or different colors expand from the center of the screen; (3) two laterally placed circles, one larger than the other, emerge and recede alternately from two points of gravity, exchanging their relative scales in each alternation; (4) a central black circle enlarges with a vaguely defined red corona; (5) circles and rings, in different colors, come out of screen depth simultaneously, and the area of their overlapping takes on new colors; (6) an expanding square alternates between being black within against a diminishing colored space and colored within against a black space; (7) amid these intricate variations of orderly patterns, eccen-

trically placed squares, circles, and squares containing circles appear; (8) different parts of the screen change at different speeds. A deep red accents the first section.

In the second section the tonality shifts to a bluish-green with considerable use of red and white. Here the triangle makes its first appearance, initially in sequential sets of four wedges exploding outward, later with as many as sixteen wedges in eight concentric rings. Generally, the placement of figures is more irregular than in the earlier section and the rhythmic interactions even more complex, because the central organizing pulse itself can suddenly fluctuate. When black circles with colored coronas appear, complex explosions of rings of wedges are syncopated within them. As the film progresses, the pace of the explosions increases.

In the third section the importance of the circle diminishes; it only appears at the end. The square and the rectangle take the center now. All over the screen there are squares, grids, and bars. There is no break in the continual blending of different kinds of grids and squares throughout this section. This is the most decentralized part of the film. Throughout it, there is a periodic but repressed background of exploding wedges. Towards the end of the section a dialectic establishes itself between eccentricity and centrality, in which the shift of axes of the wedges plays a decisive role.

The final quarter of the film derives its pulse from the continual expansion of rings from the center of the screen. In opposition to this dominant trope: (1) fast moving sets of radiating rings appear eccentrically; (2) circles grow out of pie-like sections (as in *No. 2*) and reduce themselves to sections; (3) squares emerge, turn into grids, and dissolve into blackness; (4) a single red triangle wanders around the screen and disappears in its center with an explosion of wedges; and (5) squares appear within squares.

After finishing *No. 7*, Harry Smith moved from San Francisco to New York. There he began to make collage films. Unfortunately, all we know of *No. 8* and *No. 9* are his laconic notes. By the time he made *No. 10* and *No. 11*, which are versions of the same film, he had a highly developed collage animation technique in color. Many of the formal operations of the earlier films, especially *No. 7*, were incorporated into these two films. Of the several modes of tension in these works, the relationship between the screen as an enclosed world and offscreen space is particularly important. Similarly, the dialectics between a flat plane of action and illusory depth, between collage animation and abstract convulsions of the whole image, between gravity and the screen as an open field of movement, between sequences of transformation and abrupt change, derive from and elaborate upon the strategies of his earlier films.

Both *No. 10* and *No. 11* are pointedly hermetic. They describe analogies among Tarot cards, Cabalistic symbolism, Indian chiromancy and dancing, Buddhist mandalas, and Renaissance alchemy. The process of animation itself, with its continual transformations, provides the vehicle for this giant equation. Surrealism's version of the hermetic enters in at least twice, rupturing the logic of the occult analogies through unexpected

and irrational juxtapositions. The first of these inclusions is a postman in a child's wagon, who plays an important role in the film because of his resistance to being transformed. The second is the comic appearance of a grimacing woman, looking out of a window near the end of both films. The presence of such imagery, which jars the consistency of the film, provides yet another dialectic and paradoxically enriches the hermeticism it is confounding by distancing it from the rational.

A detailed description of these films, shot as they are, would require a volume. So many of the fleeting collages are composed of internal subcollages, associating within a single shape the iconography of different cultures, that several pages would be needed to describe each one's presence, which lasts on the screen perhaps a second, before one could go on to the shape it changes into. Beyond that there is a welter of images and symbols moving around or behind the central image at many points in the film. In short, Harry Smith is utilizing cinema's potential, through its speed, to confound the perception of the spectator with a profusion of complex imagery.

No. 10 begins with snow crystals falling through the frame. They become a molecular cluster with an abstract circumference of outward pointing red wedges. The atoms of the molecule separate to become the tree of life, an outlined figure with ten points which is the central Cabalistic diagram. A bird lands on it, turning it into a skeleton with various totemic masks. The most dynamic and most often employed illusion of depth in the film emerges from the creation of a recessed room or theater whose walls are receding planes of different colors. As on a stage, it looks as if a fourth wall has been removed so we can see within.

The first appearance of this theater coincides with the breakup of the skeleton and its reformation as a masked shaman, who floats upward through the ceiling and off-screen, leaving the space empty for a moment before it fades out. Soon an athanor (a basic piece of alchemical equipment) encloses an unsupported flame in the center of the room. In the earlier films an act of enclosure, of circles within a square, for example, almost always initiated a chain of transformations of the forms within the framing device at a rhythm all its own. So too here, enclosures generate interior metamorphoses. The fire constantly changes its shape, becoming birds and alchemical symbols, while the legged mask continues to circle the stage.

Against a black background an Indian dancer floats down from the top of the screen on a pill box. An entire constellation of symbols fuses into the back of a playing card. When the dancer crosses in front of it, she leaves her shadow on the card. Her dance is synchronously reflected in the shadow. Although she will soon be transformed, her image will reappear again, for she is the central female presence in *No. 10*.

Throughout the transformations of the dancer, her shadow remains on the back of the card. The shadow dances by itself, sending out a lightning stroke which creates a postman on a red wagon. He will become the

central male figure of the film, the dancer's counterpart. At the completion of the dance the shadow becomes the dancer, and she and the postman, both inscribed in rings, orbit one another, while a series of rays emanate from the center of the screen.

The spatial dialectic of the film now becomes more intricate. Layers parallel to the plane of the screen tend to move or fracture to reveal another plane immediately behind it. This happens, for instance, when an object floats down-screen revealing the postman behind it. But when he tries to reach the dancer, the theater reconstitutes itself, now subdivided into barriers which frustrate his pursuit.

The moon descends from covering the whole screen to an arc with a black spot above it. From behind flies an orbiting planet, followed by a stork. Then a mushroom and the Rosetta Stone grow out of the moon. The dancer steps from in back of one stone; from the other the postman. They step behind these objects again and reappear as doubles: two identical dancers and two postmen.

The dancers and postmen join hands beside and on top of each other in chiastic order, while the moon descends, leaving them floating in space. In quick succession they change into a tree of life; a bird above three serpents holding the sun, the moon, and the earth; and a headless man, standing on the earth holding the sun and moon in his hands while small squares gush from his neck. He becomes a smaller version of the moon than the one that has just descended. A Tibetan demon appears behind that moon and carries it away in his mouth, while the couple float by on a cerebrum, leaving a conch, which turns into the end title.

Most of the imagery of *No. 11*, or *Mirror Animations*, is identical to that of *No. 10*. The film differs essentially in that it is carefully synchronized to Thelonius Monk's "Mysterioso." Most of the significant scenes of the earlier film recur here with slight variations; the dance of the Indian and her shadow, the pursuit within the subdivided theater, the chiromantic variations, and the grimacing woman in the window, which has become a picture frame all appear in approximately the same sequence. The tree of life, the snake, the symbols of the sun, moon, Hermes and Neptune within the pillbox, the Tarot cards, and the athanor present themselves in altered contexts. The Buddhist and Tibetan imagery, as well as the entire end of the film from the appearance of the moon on, are absent.

The most prominent innovation in *No. 11*, a priestess dressed in white who is created at the beginning of the film when lightning strikes a snowflake, generates rhythmic and structural differences. Her priestly gestures are synchronized to the pulse of Monk's music. Her centrality at the beginning and end of the film finds reinforcement in regular movements of figures and triangles of light around all four sides of the screen. The transformations occur within the metrical pattern established by the movements of her arms, even when she is not on the screen. Her presence and the way she brackets the whole film diminish the roles of the dancer and the postman.

Despite some elaborations on the spatial strategies of *No. 10*, such as a scene in which the snake wraps itself around the back of the recessed theater and snatches a figure within it, *No. 11* underplays the dialectic of depth and plane, so important in the earlier film. There are less convulsive changes in the depicted screen space. The whole film seems to move more slowly, and the dazzling flood of imagery is somewhat chastened.

This chastening and the presence of the priestess as the mediator and controller of the operations of the film forecast the radical jump in style to *No. 12*. This film, sometimes called *The Magic Feature* or *Heaven and Earth Magic*, is Harry Smith's most ambitious and most difficult work. Although it is particularly difficult to assign dates to the animated films he made in New York, *No. 12* seems to have occupied him through most of the 1950s, especially toward the end of that decade.

The original conception of this film exemplifies the myth of the absolute film in its expansive form. The hour-long version that can be seen today is but a fragment of the original plan, but even so, it is among the very highest achievements of the American avant-garde cinema and one of the central texts of its mythopoeic phase.

In the interview published in *Film Culture*, the film-maker describes the plan for the whole film:

> I must say that I'm amazed, after having seen the black-and-white film (#12) last night, at the labor that went into it. It is incredible that I had enough energy to do it. Most of my mind was pushed aside into some sort of theoretical sorting of the pieces, mainly on the basis that I have described: First, I collected the pieces out of old catalogues and books and whatever; then made up file cards of all possible combinations of them; then, I spent maybe a few months trying to sort the cards into logical order. A script was made for that. All the script and the pieces were made for a film at least four times as long. There were wonderful masks and things cut out. Like when the dog pushes the scene away at the end of the film, instead of the title "end" what is really there is a transparent screen that has a candle burning behind it on which a cat fight begins—shadow forms of cats begin fighting. Then, all sorts of complicated effects; I had held these off. The radiations were to begin at this point. Then Noah's Ark appears. There were beautiful scratchboard drawings, probably the finest drawings I ever made—really pretty. Maybe 200 were made for that one scene. Then there's a graveyard scene, when the dead are all raised again. What actually happens at the end of the film is everybody's put in a teacup, because all kinds of horrible monsters came out of the graveyard, like animals that folded into one another. Then everyone gets thrown in a teacup, which is made out of a head, and stirred up. This is the Trip to Heaven and the Return, then

> the Noah's Ark, then The Raising of the Dead, and finally the Stirring of Everyone in a Teacup. It was to be in four parts. The script was made up for the whole works on the basis of sorting pieces. It was exhaustingly long in its original form. When I say that it was cut, mainly what was cut out was, say, instead of the little man bowing and then standing up, he would stay bowed down much longer in the original. The cutting that was done was really a correction of timing. It's better in its original form.[9]

Although the film was shot in black-and-white, he built a projector with color filters that could change the tint of the images. Furthermore, the whole film was to be projected through a series of masking slides which would transform the shape of the screen. The slides take the form of important images within the film, such as a watermelon or an egg. Thus the entire movement would be enclosed within the projection of the slide. A different filter could determine the color of the surrounding slides. The whole apparatus functioned only once. In the late 1950s or early 1960s he presented the film for potential backers at Steinway Hall in New York. He would have liked to have installed seats in the form of the slide images—a watermelon seat, an egg seat, etc.—with an electrically controlled mechanism that would have changed the colors and the slides in accordance with the movements of the spectators in their seats. Lacking the extravagant means necessary to achieve this, he manipulated the changes by hand.

Despite the multiplicity of their references and obscure allusions *Nos. 10* and *11* offer easier access to the viewer than *No. 12*. Here Smith avoids historical iconography, with the possible exception of the universally understood skeleton. The form of the film evokes hermetic maneuvers, which are all the more distanced because of their abstraction and lack of specificity. The tone of the film seems to call for a close reading which the form frustrates. Furthermore, the investigation of his sources, which he alludes to obliquely in his note on the film, opens up seemingly fruitful approaches to the film without ever providing satisfying insights.

The note veers from an elliptical description of the film's images to allusions about its sources. When he writes, "Next follows an elaborate exposition of the heavenly land in terms of Israel, Montreal and the second part depicts the return to earth from being eaten by Max Muller on the day Edward the Seventh dedicated the Great Sewer of London," he is deliberately obscuring the film with hints about it. By Israel he means the Cabala, particularly the three books translated by MacGregor Mathers as *The Kabbalah Unveiled:* "The Book of Concealed Mystery," "The Greater Holy Assembly," and "The Lesser Holy Assembly." Here the Cabalists interpret the tree of life in terms of the body of God, with intricate and detailed descriptions of features, members, configurations of the beard, and so on.

The reference to Montreal, he later explained, indicates the parallel influence of Dr. Wildner Penfield of the Montreal Neurological Institute, whose extensive open brain operations on epileptics are described in *Epilepsy and the Functional Anatomy of the Human Brain* (Little, Brown, Boston, 1954). Several aspects of Penfield's book intrigued Smith: the hallucinations of the patients under brain surgery; the topology and geography of the cerebral cortex; and the distribution and juxtaposition of nervous centers. His occasional remark that *No. 12* takes place in the fissure of Silvius, one of the major folds in the brain, is another allusion to Penfield.

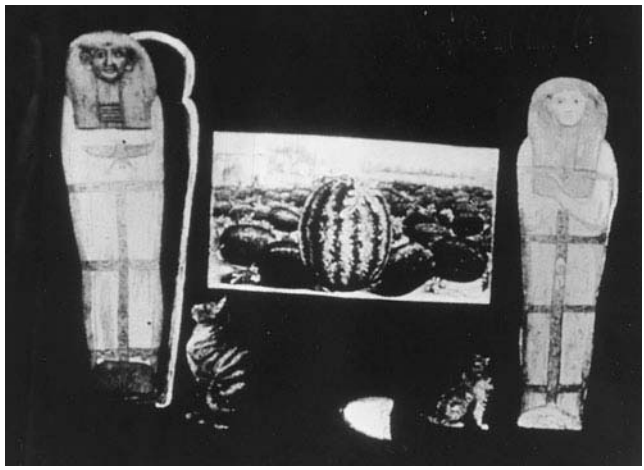
A photograph of Max Muller, the nineteenth-century philologist and editor of *The Sacred Books of the East,* actually appears in the film. What Smith does not say is that this is the only face, out of several, which has a specific reference. Naturally, Smith's identification of this figure, which has a privileged place in the film, leads us to wonder, fruitlessly, who the other Victorian visages might be.

Finally, the allusion to the day the London sewers were inaugurated turns out to refer to the cover story of an illustrated magazine that provided many of the elements of the collage. The very choice of late-nineteenth-century engravings as the materials for his collage brings to mind the influence of Max Ernst's books, *La Femme 100 Têtes* and *Une Semaine de Bonté*. As we shall see, there are other, structural links with Ernst in this film.

The broadest outline of the "action" of *No. 12* agrees with the filmmaker's ironic note. As in *No. 10*, there are two main characters, a man and a woman; but here the man assumes the role of the priestess from *No. 11*, not that of the postman. Although Smith has described him as having the same function as the prop-mover in traditional Japanese theater, his continual manipulations in the alchemical context of *No. 12*, coupled with his almost absolute resistance to change when everything else, including the heroine, is under constant metamorphosis, elevates him to the status of a magus. According to the argument of the film, he injects her with a magical potion while she sits in a diabolical dentist's chair. She rises to heaven and becomes fragmented. The "elaborate exposition of the heavenly land" occurs while the magus attempts a series of operations to put her back together. He does not succeed until after they are eaten by the giant head of a man (Max Muller), and they are descending to earth in an elevator. Their arrival coincides with an obscure celebration, seen in scatological imagery (the Great Sewer), in which a climatic recapitulation of the journey blends into an ending which is the exact reversal of the opening shots.

The reader of Dr. Penfield might identify the injection of the heroine and the subsequent explosion of her cranium with the effects of open brain surgery on the conscious patient. Since the operation is painless, after a local anesthetic has been applied to the surface of the skull, Penfield had

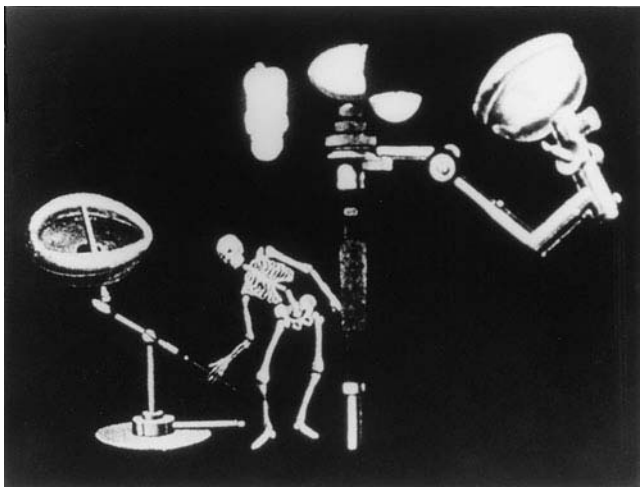
(a)



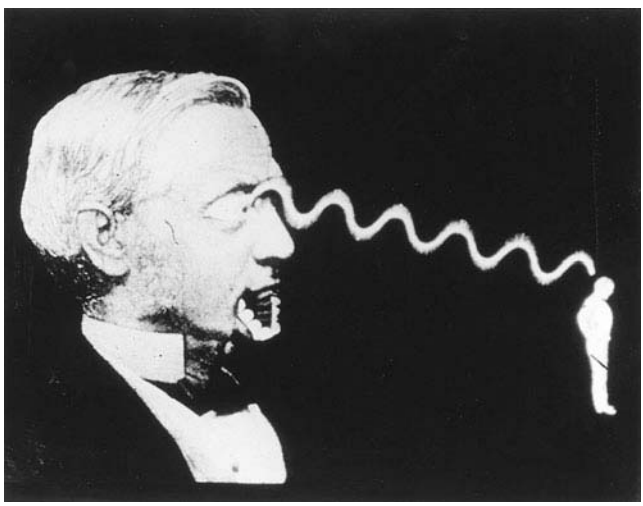
(b)

(a) Harry Smith's *No. 12*: The initial scene.
(b) The ascent to heaven on a dentist's chair.
(c) The skeleton juggling a baby in the central tableau of heaven.
(d) Max Muller casts a spell on the Magus.
(e) The return to the initial scene.

(c)



(d)



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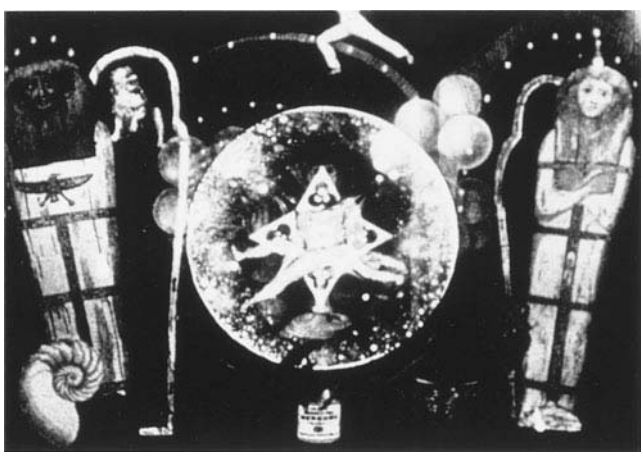


his patients talk while he probed their brains with his surgical needle. Individual patients' visions, memories, sensory illusions, and motor reactions when particular areas of their brains were touched were recorded by Penfield in numerous case histories.

A significant case of the fusion of a religious cosmology with mental disorder would be Daniel Paul Schreber's *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*.[10] Harry Smith first brought this book to my attention in a context unrelated to *No. 12*, but later he referred to the first tableau after the ascent as "Schreber's heaven." In the book, a well educated, influential German jurist vividly describes two periods of extreme paranoia in 1884 and 1893. The text is neither clinical nor apocalyptic. Although Schreber sees himself as mentally disturbed, he presents his fantasies as metaphysical revelations and himself as the privileged martyr to these insights. In essence, his thesis is that God attracts human nerves to the "forecourts of heaven." Among his numerous paranoid hallucinations were the ideas that he had contact on the nerve plane with other people, which they refused to admit in the flesh; that his stomach had been replaced with an inferior one; and that the boundaries of male and female were confused within him. Freud wrote a psychoanalytical study of the book, finding in it a psychosis based on homosexual fears. Harry Smith seems to be interested in it, as in all psychological phenomena, because of the quality of its imagination.

Schreber's father, Daniel Gottlob Moritz Schreber, was a physician and author of a very popular exercise book, *Medical Indoor Exercises*. From this book Smith took the character of the magus. By cataloguing the illustrations for the exercises, he collected a sequence of gestures which he animated into all the movements of the film's main character.

What makes *No. 12* much more complicated than its argument and what obscures its outlines is the multiplicity of details filling the images and the refusal on the part of the film-maker to indicate levels of importance among these details. For example, before the dentist's chair can be used, it must be adjusted. A bird might lay an egg, out of which comes the hammer with which the magus can transform the dentist's chair. Other figures carry out bottles, mortars and pestles, and enema bulbs to prepare a liquid with which to oil the chair, and an almost identical set of operations is repeated for the preparation of the potion to be injected into the heroine. Since the viewer never knows the desired end of an operation or a series of operations, he must divide his attention evenly among these endless and varied procedures.

In addition to this, countless creatures and things are crossing the screen while these actions are going on—a dog, a cat, a skeleton horse, a walking house, a cow, a sheep, two spoon-like creatures, an homunculus, birds. At times they contribute to the operation at hand, but just as often their participation is deliberately obscure.

The technique of distancing the dramatic focus of a story behind a continual foreground of evenly accented detail is a literary tactic dating

from the novels of Raymond Roussel, before the First World War, and periodically revived, most recently in the plays of Richard Foreman. In *No. 12* Harry Smith has offered its hypostatic equivalent in cinema. His continual alternation of associative and disassociative sound effects underlines this distancing; for as often as he will synchronize the sound of a dog barking when the dog crosses the screen or of screams when the woman is being dismembered, he will connect mooings with a horse, suddenly inject applause, or preface or follow an event with the sound appropriate to it.

Perhaps even more disorienting than the pressure of detail or the dialectic of sound is the random combination of certain recurrent images. Like Brakhage in *Prelude: Dog Star Man*, Harry Smith found a way of incorporating chance operations in his film without sacrificing its structure. In *Film Culture* he says:

> All the permutations possible were built up: say, there's a hammer in it, and there's a vase, and there's a woman and there's a dog. Various things could then be done—hammer hits dog; woman hits dog; dog jumps into vase; so forth. It was possible to build up an enormous number of cross references.[11]

> I tried as much as possible to make the whole thing automatic, the production automatic rather than any kind of logical process. Though, at this point, Allen Ginsberg denies having said it, about the time I started making those films, he told me that William Burroughs made a change in the Surrealistic process—because, you know, all that stuff comes from the Surrealists—that business of folding a piece of paper: One person draws the head and then folds it over, and somebody else draws the body. What do they call it? The Exquisite Corpse. Somebody later, perhaps Burroughs, realized that something was directing it, that it wasn't arbitrary, and that there was some kind of what you might call God. It wasn't just chance.[12]

> I never did finish that sentence about the relation of Surrealism to my things: I assumed that something was controlling the course of action and that it was not simply arbitrary, so that by sortilege (as you know, there is a system of divination called "sortilege") everything would come out alright.[13]

Smith's use of chance coincides with his idea of the mantic function of the artist. He has said, "My movies are made by God; I was just the medium for them." The chance variations on the basic imagistic vocabulary of the film provide yet another metaphor between his film and the Great Work of the alchemists. For the Renaissance alchemist, the preparation of his tools and of himself equalled in importance the act of trans-

formation itself. Since every element in an alchemical change had to be perfect, each instrument and chemical had its own intricate preparation. Alchemical texts tend to read like endless recipes of purification, fire-making, etc. The commitment to preliminaries is so strong that in its spiritual interpretation, alchemy becomes the slow perfection of the alchemist; the accent shifts from goals to processes. The viewer of *No. 12* finds himself confronted with repetitive scenes of preparation—an egg hatches a hammer, which changes a machine, which will produce a liquid, etc.—toward a *telos* that brings us back to the beginning. The characters of the film end up precisely as they were at the beginning. Everything returns to its place of origin.

No. 12 shares with the mythopoeic cinema of Brakhage, Anger, and Markopoulos the theme of the divided being or splintered consciousness which must be reintegrated. As I have shown in the previous chapters, this theme is an inheritance from Romanticism. In Smith's version of the myth, heaven and the human brain are conflated. When the physically divided woman first arrives in heaven she is seen within the frame of a female head. Her release from the anxieties of selfhood comes at the end of the film when the elevator brings her back to earth, down through the titanic body of Max Muller, who is last seen circumscribed by the same female head. Her disappearance from the action of the middle of the film cannot be construed as an escape from her anxiety, which I have called selfhood; these are her moments of maximal fragmentation, when all of the magus' efforts are directed at bringing her back, or at least preparing the tools to do so.

Although there is no movement into or out of screen depth, various strategies are employed to suggest, at times, a recess of space there. The radiating balls, which help to create the illusion of ascent and descent to and from heaven, are the first of these. A room or theater is suggested immediately afterward in the first of the heavenly landscapes. Finally, the image of the Great Sewer, the last backdrop of the film, gives the impression of a group of receding arcades.

Among the more interesting spatial strategies in *No. 12* are the sudden manifestations of the law of gravity. Through most of the film, figures simply move along virtual horizontal lines imagined within the black background. They do not need the support of a floor or structure to keep from falling out of the frame. But occasionally, as when the arch forms in the lower part of the screen, such support suddenly becomes necessary. The most dramatic use of this change of pace occurs during the episode in which a line of couches descends vertically down the screen. They create a void within the screen. The magus cannot pass without leaping on to one of the passing couches for support. His alternative, of course, is to float over the void by using the umbrella.

A related configuration of space within the black background would be the series of arches through which the magus walks or rides on the couch-boat. Normally, passage across the screen is smooth, along a single

plane. When he begins to pass through arches by crossing in front of the right-hand pillar and behind the left-hand pillar of the arch, a sense of depth emerges without the illusion of diminishing into the vanishing point of the screen.

The circularity of the film's form, the use of nineteenth-century engravings, and above all the theme of the mutable woman recall Max Ernst's collage novel, *La Femme 100 Têtes* (1929), whose title in French puns as the woman with *100 (cent)* heads or the woman without (*sans*) heads. That novel, in collage pictures, begins and ends with the same image. Within it are sections and subsections built on varying degrees of thematic and narrative sequence. Whenever a series of plates has a specific narrative and therefore temporal logic, Ernst introduces another image or images into the collage which does not follow the same unity of time or scale.

The collages abound in complex machinery and scenes of violence and dismemberment. Studying the images in sequence, the reader experiences promises of narration which continually evaporate or transform into chains of metaphor. The ultimate unity of the book is that of the dream. Harry Smith has said that he let his dreams determine the filming of *No. 12*. According to his account, he slept fitfully in the studio where he was filming for the entire year in which the film was being shot. He would sleep for a while, then animate his dreams. The exact relation between his dreams and the structure of the film is ambiguous, unless we can suppose that he dreamed the life of the figures he had already cut out and assembled for his film. What is more likely is that he established an intuitive relationship between the structure of his dreams and the substructure of the film.

In 1971 at Anthology Film Archives Smith spontaneously delivered a lecture to a group of students he happened upon in that theater. As they were looking at a film, not by him, in the realist tradition—a film of photographed actuality—he said, "You shouldn't be looking at this as a continuity. Film frames are hieroglyphs, even when they look like actuality. You should think of the individual film frame, always, as a glyph, and then you'll understand what cinema is about."

It is certainly true that within Smith's own work the hieroglyph is essential. When he finally began to shoot actualities for *No. 14* (1965), he translated the spatial and temporal tactics of his earlier films into superimposed structures. From an opening reel—for the film is made up of whole, unedited one hundred foot reels of film multiply-exposed in the camera—in which relatively flat and carefully controlled surfaces (a composition of a store window or animated objects) are laid upon images of depth (receding night lights or rooms), the film proceeds to more random conjunctions of autobiographical material, from interiors to exteriors, from richly orchestrated colors to washed-out browns. In the final reels, the film gradually retraces its formal course, returning to the animated precision, spatial dialogue, and surface texture of the opening. In the center

of the film Smith himself gets drunk while discussing his project for a recording of the Kiowa peyote ritual with Folkways records, and after a passage of leader—he did not even cut off the head and tail leaders that were attached to the individual rolls—we see the Kiowa and their environment. It is as if he had opened up his hieroglyphic art to make a space for a limited self-portrait.

Later he managed to fuse animation directly to live photography when he combined "The Approach to Emerald City," the most complete of the surviving fragments of *No. 13*, with a sequence he shot in 1968 with a teleidoscope (a projecting kaleidoscope of his own construction) in order to make *The Tin Woodsman's Dream*. The temporal hiatus between the two parts of this film apparently means nothing to Smith, who sees the whole of his work, not just his cinema, as a single edifice.

Jordan Belson, Smith's closest associate in their early years in San Francisco, has made a contribution to the graphic film of comparable magnitude. Curiously, like Smith, he made a teleidoscopic film, *Raga* (1959), as well as at least one effort at dealing with actual surfaces with the control of an animator, *Bop Scotch* (1953). But proceeding from an attitude towards time and the working process diametrically opposed to Smith's, he has suppressed these films. In Belson's formulation of the absolute film, at least until 1970, the newest work is the only *present* film; it subsumes and makes obsolete his earlier achievements.

Belson is aware of the philosophical consequences of such a commitment to the all-consuming present. He is reticent about discussing his own past, and what he does say of it underlines his distance from it. Interestingly, that reticence extends to discussions of the "past" of the very films he willingly exhibits, particularly the techniques of their making. Yet he is eager to discuss the spiritual sources of his films. This is not inconsistent, as the films aspire to incarnate those source experiences and save them from time. They are transcendental, and their maker is a transcendentalist.

Jordan Belson too began his career as a painter and soon allied himself with Smith and the Kandinsky-Bauer tradition, although, to judge from his scrolls from the early fifties, he never committed himself to hard-edged geometry. Instead, he located his style in proximity to the later paintings of Kandinsky in which the rigidly defined forms give way to a more atmospheric abstractionism and a painterly treatment of line and shape.

The few early films I have managed to see grow out of and inform the paintings, for there is an undisguised will toward movement in the scrolls. Belson graduated from the California School of Fine Arts in 1946 (just two years before Peterson gave his first film-making course there), and the next year, inspired by the screenings at Art in Cinema, he made his first film, *Transmutation* (1947), which is now destroyed. According to the film-maker, it was made under the immediate inspiration of seeing Richter's *Rhythmus 21*. *Improvisations #1*, from the following year, is also lost.

The earliest surviving films date from the beginning of the 1950s: *Mambo* (1951), *Caravan* (1952), *Mandala* (1953), and *Bop Scotch* (1953). The first three describe a gradual movement toward meditative imagery and rhythms. From the rather expressionistic oval forms, bright colors, and calligraphic designs of *Mambo*, which at times resembles the texture of William Baziotes's paintings, Belson refined his imagery in *Caravan*, emphasizing both the geometrical (radiating circles against moving backgrounds) and the biomorphic (serpentine and spermatoid shapes). Although the *yin-yang* emblem finds its way into *Caravan*, it is the subsequent film, *Mandala*, that definitively aspires to be an object of meditation in the Easter tradition, as its name indicates. The geometry of *Mandala* is even more emphatic than in the earlier film. The transformations are slower, and there are discrete jumps in positions. For the first time a discrete pulse gives a regular rhythm to the entire film.

After another period of concentration on his painting, Belson was led back to cinema after collaborating with the composer Henry Jacobs on the Vortex concerts of abstract and cosmic imagery with electronic sound at the San Francisco Planetarium (1957–1959). Of the finished and abandoned films from this period, *Flight* (1958), *Raga* (1959), *Seance* (1959), *Allures* (1961), *LSD*, and *Illusions* (dates uncertain), the author has seen only *Allures* and the teleidoscopic film *Raga*. They represent the termination of his initial conception of cinema and forecast the transition to his mature style, which emerges after still another renunciation of cinema—this time in a profound despair over the value of art. Simply stated, the early films, up until and including *Allures*, are objects of meditation. The subsequent works, his nine major films, describe the meditative quest through a radical interiorization of mandalic objects and cosmological imagery.

Allures is actually the filmic result of Belson's experience with the Vortex concerts in the late fifties. Although it blends images of becoming and apperception (dissolving and congealing spheres, color flickers, hot spots of light) with its predominantly geometrical and mechanically symmetrical patterns, it comes short of delineating a perceptual process in its overall structure. These moments of organic metamorphosis bind together and bracket the electro-astronomical imagery (expanding rings, receding circles, emerging spirals, eclipses, oscilloscopic lines, dot grids, and spheres of orbiting pin-point lights) which forms the center of attention in the film.

Belson acknowledges a debt to James Whitney as his instructor in the mandalic potential of the graphic film. Aside from the film exercises he made with his brother John, James Whitney has made two films of his own, *Yantra* (1950–1955) and *Lapis* (1963–1966). The latter is the most elaborate example of a mandala in cinema. It utilizes a field of tiny dots, symmetrically organized in hundreds of very fine concentric rings, to generate slowly changing intricate patterns which are most precise in the center of the wheel, disintegrating at the outer rings. The film consists of

movements into the center of this wheel of dots, which at first expands beyond the borders of the frame, and movements away from it, showing its circular boundaries. Changes of color, scale, speed, and dot pattern attend the visual movements, but they are orchestrated in time so as to suggest a formal circle, the opening images and color flicker being almost exactly repeated at the end. Both structurally and visually *Lapis* conforms to the circular form of the mandala; its elaborate movements belie a fundamental stasis.

None of Belson's early films are classical mandalas, but they all have the objective of being vehicles of meditation. According to the film-maker, they represent the "impersonal" phase of his career. That single word describes the fate of modernist geometrical art in the American avant-garde film. Like the trance film, the graphic film flourished in the first years after the war and then failed to sustain its vitality into the 1950s. We have seen how Harry Smith's art veered from the geometrical to the mythopoeic without abandoning animation, and in the next chapter I shall show how the graphic film was renewed in Europe by an American and an Austrian. Belson's successive resignations from film-making, James Whitney's retirement after *Lapis*, John Whitney's silence until the cybernetic alternative renewed his inspiration in the late 1960s, and Len Lye's fate, all attest to the exhaustion of a formalist cinema in America.

When Belson gave up film-making in the early sixties, he diverted his creative energy to the practice of Hatha yoga. When the Ford Foundation offered him one of their coveted $10,000 grants in 1964, he turned them down. But after reconsidering, he accepted the money and reentered film-making with *Re-Entry*, the first of his "personal" films. For Belson the opposition of impersonal to personal art does not indicate an antithesis of geometrical formalism to Expressionism. As a yogi, Belson seeks the transcendence of the self. His personal cinema delineates the mechanics of transcendence in the rhetoric of abstractionism.

In *Re-Entry* he successfully synthesizes the Yogic and the cosmological elements in his art for the first time by forcefully abstracting and playing down both of them. The great advance of this film over all of his earlier work consists in the organization of its images into an intentional structure. From an opening of symmetrically ordered dots, moving along the plane of the flat screen and along illusionary lines of depth, the film moves, as if impelled by a directional force, through a fluid series of gaseous colors with a single metaphoric allusion to solar prominences. A second metaphor, the abstraction of a waterfall, focuses the amorphous bands of color into a series of vivid veils lifting to reveal the formation of a spherical vortex which congeals in the final moment into a planet, as if the whole thrust of the film had been towards this one point.

In his very useful description of this and the subsequent three Belson films, Gene Youngblood has to go to the vocabulary of the color chart to portray the changes within the film, from "pale manganese blue" to "cobalt violet" and "alizarin crimson." He also informs us, presumably on

the film-maker's authority, that the twin sources of the film were John Glenn's first satellite voyage and the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, and he interprets the structure of the film as "leaving the earth's atmosphere (death), moving through deep space (karmic illusions), and re-entry into the earth's atmosphere (rebirth)."

With the making of his next film, *Phenomena* (1965), Belson elaborated on the teleological structure. He gave it the same thrust towards its ending—a passage through gaseous space toward a climactic image—but he also elaborated an opening drive away from concrete imagery into the gaseous spectrum of the center. This time the flow of consciousness is not cyclic, as in *Re-Entry*; it is transcendent, from the phenomena of nature to the final apperceptive union of the planet with the pupil of the eye.

Youngblood quotes Belson, who described the film as

> an extremely capsulized history of creation on earth, including all the elements and man. It's the human sociological-racial experience on one level, and it's a kind of biological experience in the sense that it's physical. It's seen with the blinders of humanity, you know, just being a human, grunting on the face of the earth, exercising and agonizing. There's even a touch of the Crucifixion in there—a brief suggestion of a crown of thorns, a red ring of centers, each emitting a kind of thorny light cluster. The man and the woman are Adam and Eve if they're anyone. I see them as rather comic at that point. At the end of course it's pure consciousness and they're like gods. The end of the film is the opposite of the beginning; it's still life on earth but not seen from within, as *sangsara*, but as if you were approaching it from outside of consciousness so to speak. From cosmic consciousness. As though you were approaching it as a god.

The man and woman referred to are abstracted faces, possibly photographed through a stippled glass off a television screen near the beginning of the film. They are presented in a montage of colors, shapes, and textures unusually collisive for Belson, pulsating to a rock-like electronic beat. This frenetic and elliptical sequence is what he meant by the "capsulized history," although the two human figures are its only emblematic images. (The reference to the Crucifixion in the clusters of brilliant red sparks against a blue base is more a personal association than a factor in the force of the film.)

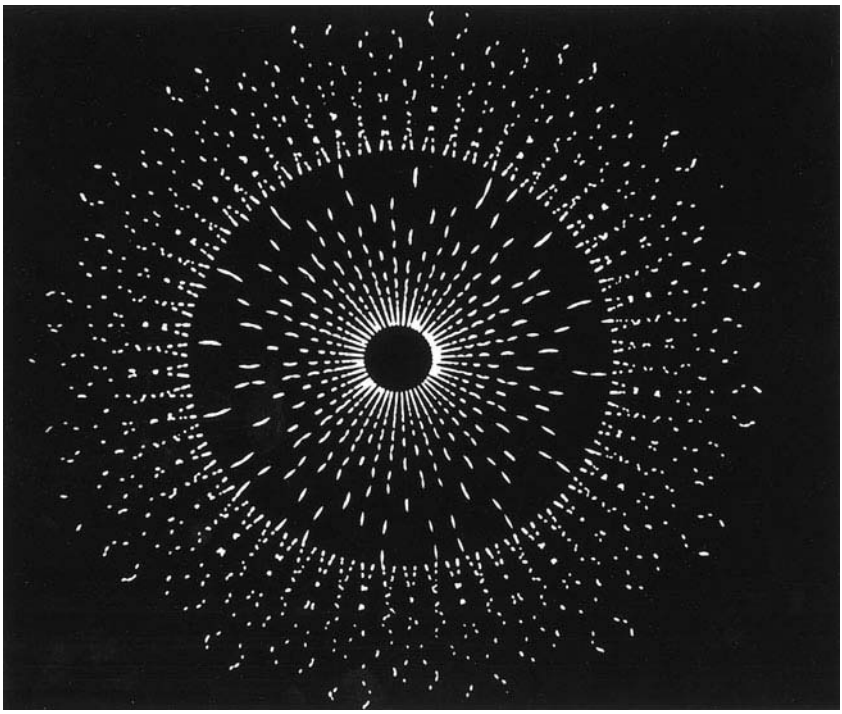
However, in *Phenomena*, Belson supports the rhythm of his images by carefully selected and abstracted sound, and he also creates an audible movement from irony to purity. The opening abstraction of rock music is itself an element in the image of *sangsara*—the frantic vision of life from the perspective of a mind limited to following its appearances, the "phenomena" of the title. The soundtrack ends, appropriately, in applause.

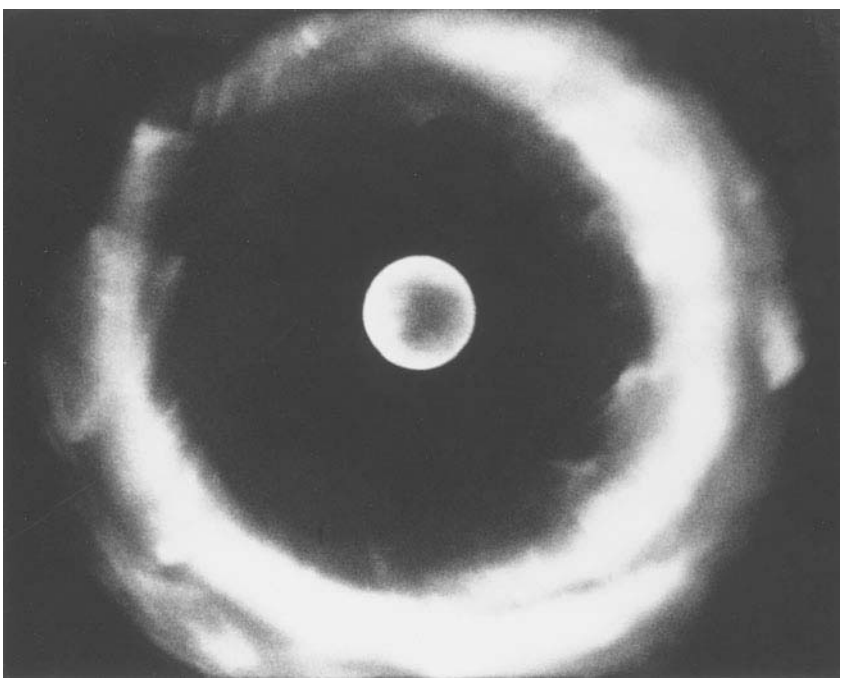
In the rise beyond appearances, the echoing distortions of a passage of German lieder inaugurate a sequence of patterned imagery. The screen becomes grids of symmetrical cells, changing their vibrant colors in waves. The progressive dissolution of these geometrical fields, as the fragmented song becomes a buzz, extends the metaphor of a movement implicit in the succession of geometrical abstraction following the colliding textures and images. That movement reaches its end in the center of the film—the gases of pure color, which in turn begin their own intentional motion towards a new concretion. They pull first vertically, then horizontally across the screen until a central vortex forms. It crystallizes into a planetary sphere which in the final image becomes the negative center of the positive space around it—the teleological image of an immense eye. This metaphor is as close as Belson ever comes to the self-reflexive. Both his illusionism and his cosmology repudiate apperception. His films seem to postulate that once the consciousness begins its transcendental movement, the self upon which it might then look back vanishes; they do not accept the post-Romantic paradoxes which define the horizons of so many other films in the American avant-garde tradition, and this is both a weakness and a strength.

Even an art as deeply indebted to Eastern metaphysics as Belson's does not find its tradition in Eastern religious art, much as it might aspire to it and derive images or forms from it. The aesthetic use of oriental thought is a Romantic tradition, and a particularly fertile one in America. Belson is closer to the Emerson of *Circles* as an artist than to Ramana Maharshi or Tibetan iconographers. "The eye is the first circle; the horizon which it forms is the second; and throughout nature this primary figure is repeated without end. It is the highest emblem in the cipher of the world." These opening lines of Emerson's essay might be the motto of *Phenomena*. Some pages later, he forecasts the scenario of Belson's next film, *Samadhi*, writing, "Yet this incessant movement and progression of which all things partake could never become sensible to us but by contrast to some principle of fixture or stability in the soul. Whilst the eternal generation of circles proceeds, the eternal generator abides. That central life is somewhat superior to creation, superior to knowledge and thought, and contains all its circles."

Samadhi recapitulates the ending of *Phenomena* in its initial moments. (From this point on it will be an interestingly deliberate strategy of Belson's to begin a new film at the point where the previous one ends.) In the middle of *Phenomena*, the gases had briefly dissolved into a bumpy, concave field resembling rows of small translucent balls melted together or perhaps an abstraction of the furrows of the cerebral cortex. Belson begins *Samadhi* with this mysterious and haunting image in several forms, as colors sweep over a rippling surface. Then he repeats a figure-ground transition which turns a planetary circle into an eye.

From this point on the film sustains an unbroken intensity, engendering a chilling ecstasy. In the center of the screen circular forms undergo a





Jordan Belson's cosmic geometry in *Allures* and *Samadhi*.

chain of transformations. Large gaseous balls revolve; small distant spheres radiate rings of fire and fill the entire frame with their outpouring luminosity. A retarded breathing sound becomes an interiorized wind. By extending the respiratory pace of the breathing into electronic pitches and percussive rhythms, the film-maker created an aural counterpart to the transitions from fluid or fiery balls to hard spheres which constitute the visual center of the film.

The continual, slow metamorphosis of images and the illusions of emergence and recession suggest a movement on the spectator's part into the depth of the screen. It is the movement of consciousness towards *samadhi*, the union of subject and object, or the fusion of *atma* (breath) and mind. This state, which reveals the pure white light of the force called *kundalini*, is one of the principal goals of Yogic meditation.

The statements that Youngblood quotes about *Samadhi* indicate as much as could be known in 1970 of Jordan Belson's theory of cinema.[14] For him, as for almost all other film-makers within the American avant-garde, the cinema is an instrument of discovery, a means of coming to know more, or more clearly, what is most essential to him: "Early in life I experimented with peyote, LSD, and so on. But in many ways my films are ahead of my own experience."[15] He cites *Samadhi* as the single example of a convergence of a meditative vision with one arising out of the experience of film-making: "In fact *Samadhi* is the only one in which I actually caught up with the film and ran alongside of it for just a moment."[16] But he stresses the advantage of cinema for sustaining the mystic vision:

> The film is way ahead of anything I've experienced on a continuing basis. And the same has been true of my drug experiences. They somehow set the stage for insights. I had peyote fifteen years ago but I didn't have any cosmic or *Samadhic* experiences. That remained for something to happen through development of different levels of consciousness. The new art and other forms of expression reveal the influence of mind-expansion. And finally we reach a point where there is virtually no separation between science, observation, and philosophy. The new artist works essentially the same way as the scientist. . . . But at other times the artist is able to focus more in an area of consciousness and subjective phenomena but with the same kind of scientific zeal, the same objectivity, as scientists.[17]

The particular success of discovering in the filmic material the imagery of his privileged glimpses during Yogic trances led to his version of the myth of the absolute film:

> I reached the point that what I was able to produce externally, with the equipment, was what I was seeing internally. I could close my eyes and see these images within my own being, and I

> could look out at the sky and see the same thing happening there too. And most of the time I'd see them when I looked through the viewfinder of my camera mounted on the optical bench. I've always considered image-producing equipment as an extension of the mind. The mind has produced these images and has made the equipment to produce them physically. In a way it's a projection of what's going on inside, phenomena thrown out by consciousness, which we are able to look at. In a way I'm doing something similar to the clairvoyant Ted Serrios who can project his thoughts onto Polaroid film. Only I have to filter my consciousness through an enormous background of art and film-making.[18]

The myth of the absolute film can have no more total expression than Belson's often repeated statement that he believed he would die after making *Samadhi* and he was surprised when he did not. With the remaining "momentum" of his energies he made *Momentum* (1969). That film literalized the metaphor of interior movement from *Samadhi*. In its opening shots a rocket blasts off in several different solid colors; following its trajectory, we focus on the center of the screen, where a series of enlarging circles being eclipsed and haloed by coronas suggests that the rocket's aim is at the sun. But rather than shoot into the explosive center of the image, which in its fullest magnitude fills the screen with spectacular radiations, we seem to veer over its rim, as larger and larger disks occupy the lower portion of the screen. The passage through gases, a typical feature of Belson's cinema, here takes the concrete form of movement through multicolored solar prominences.

Once past the sun, the film attains a new dimension. Structurally, it retraces the crescendo of the first half in a visionary or interiorized version of the trip to the sun. The central trope of the interiorization is the use of tiny, swarming dots in the re-enactment of the approach to the radiating sphere, which makes that spectacular image even more dynamic. At first the dots establish a difference of depth between the surface of the screen (the consciousness of the viewer-explorer) and the circular or gaseous figure in the distance (the object of that directional consciousness). This happens when white spots dance irregularly before the vague backgrounds. After they vanish, a new "sun" forms itself, even more radiant and explosive than the first. This time the consciousness, no longer mediated by the rocket ship, flows into its very center. In that movement the star itself becomes an organized haze of atomic points, like the specks of James Whitney's *Lapis*, radiating in rings out of the stellar crater, until in a final image of the starry sky, a bright central nova seems to have exploded.

Three central principles inform the cosmology of *Momentum* and the two films which follow it, *Cosmos* and *World*. They are that human consciousness, even when it believes itself to be exploring freely, is actually guided to its goal by a greater consciousness; that human consciousness

transcends itself by merging with the object which magnetized it, without losing its awareness of its history as human; and that stars, galaxies, and the very cosmos are visible bodies of consciousness in a hierarchy.

Cosmos begins at the point where *Momentum* ends; zooming through layers of stars, it continues the earlier film's thrust. At the end, it fixes an image of a galaxy in which the atomic spots of the previous film now represent whole stars; a new stage has been reached in the quest for cosmic consciousness. But between the opening and closing sections Belson has elaborated a new kind of center.

In his third cosmic film, *World* (1970), Belson again attains the visual level of his very best work, even though the film is constrained, like the previous two, by a banal musical soundtrack. The function that had earlier been fulfilled by emblematic astronomical imagery is more successfully managed in *World* by an abstract geometry reminiscent of *Allures*. In fact, the whole film looks back upon the formal coordinates of *Allures*, the mixture of symmetrical, exploding geometries and atmospheric spaces, and it includes such elements as color flickers, spiralling, comet-like shapes, oscilloscopic spheres, and expanding rings of dots in a work of architectural sophistication.

The transition between mechanical and organic forms is subtly managed by acts of enclosure and expansion which alternately seem to provide matrices for each other. The film has a crescendo-diminuendo shape which organizes its rhetoric of metamorphoses around the brilliant central image of a patterned sphere of complexly-orbiting white dots. The sphere, born of a solidification of grey gases, quickly changes into waves of expanding concentric rings. The skeletal sphere is disclosed, crucially, in the middle of the film, with the solemnity of a revealed arcanum; both the gaseous and the geometrical imagery seem to point towards it or emanate from it.

Meditation (1971) elaborates upon structures of the three films immediately preceding it, but it inscribes the astronomical metaphor within imagery of foaming water in slow motion and superimposition, flowing backwards. Like *Momentum*'s beginning with the rocket as mediator, this film suddenly shows a diver, gliding horizontally across the screen, then plunging into the center. After a chain of metamorphoses, the human mediator re-emerges as a planet-eye. First the planet-eye is a circular hole in a black ground through which stars can be seen, but as it enlarges, the ground dissolves into more stars, leaving the circle to be defined by its red corona. The evaporation of that corona identifies the observing consciousness (the hole) with its object (the stars).

Chakra (1972) attempts to improve on his masterpiece, *Samadhi*, by restating that interior quest with accent on the barriers of the different stations passed through—the *chakras* of the title—rather than on the intentional movement which had been the dynamic of the earlier film. Belson achieves an interaction of continuous propulsion with discrete, discontinuous stages by using his sound track to isolate passages of the film. By extending strong and easily identifiable sounds across a section of visual

transformations, those very transformations seem to occur within the bounded section; their propulsive energy seems directed at breaking through to the next stage, represented by the use of a new sound. The series of sounds itself (the buzz of bees, a motor, rain, high-pitched static, ocean, bells, the hum of a string instrument, drums, a flute, and music swelling to a climax) came from a sound chart in Mishra's *Fundamentals of Yoga*, just as the visual shapes correspond to the outline in Govinda's *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism*.[19] Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that they represent a reorganization of the imagery Belson uses in most of his films (swarming dots, a galaxy, circles and spheres, a video storm) to correspond to the sequence of shapes and images the Tibetan mystics saw while contemplating the progress of the *chakras* in their meditations. Belson has said that with *Chakra* the phase of his work that began with *Re-Entry* came to an end.

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The Graphic Cinema: European Perspectives

JAMES BROUGHTON, Kenneth Anger, and Gregory Markopoulos lived and made films in Europe during part of the 1950s. Their aesthetics had been molded in the 1940s in America, and the change of place did not mean a fundamental change of style or vision, despite the radical division between American and European practical film theory at that time. The avant-garde tradition in film had broken down in the early 1930s, and despite sporadic and isolated efforts at independent film-making in several countries, the only continuous and sustaining force for ambitious cinema was at the margins of the commercial industries. All three filmmakers returned to America to make their major works of the 1960s. When Anger and Markopoulos went back to Europe at the end of the decade, the situation there had been changed as a result of direct American influence.

Two important figures of the American avant-garde cinema, however, began

to make their first films in Europe in the early 1950s. They are Robert Breer, an American, whose cinema grew out of the painting he was doing in Paris in the early 1950s, and Peter Kubelka, an Austrian who went directly into cinema but who did not find a significant context for his art until he came to the United States in 1965. Breer had resettled in Palisades, New York by 1959. Although their films are obviously very different and no influence can be traced from one to the other, both have their roots in the graphic cinema of Eggeling, Richter, Duchamp, and Lye, without the mediation of the Abstract Expressionistic and mythopoeic phases that I have described in the previous chapters.

Both Breer and Kubelka were only marginally aware of the early graphic cinema. Nevertheless, they each took up its premises and reduced them to a new essence after a hiatus of more than twenty years. The similarity of their situations, if not of their films, has produced a number of related (sometimes in likeness, sometimes in opposition) theoretical positions and insights, which will become evident as I discuss their films and their theories separately. Since they both came to America as fully mature artists, their work and thought have been resistant to certain native patterns and will therefore offer an illuminating contrast within this book.

The two fundamental works of the graphic cinema from the 1920s made without animation were Fernand Léger's *Le Ballet Mécanique* and Marcel Duchamp's *Anémic Cinéma*. By extending a metaphor from several of his paintings into film, Léger compared a universe of human actions and everyday objects to the functions of a machine. The movements of a woman on a swing, the loop of another climbing a flight of steps again and again, the rapid alternation of a hat and a shoe through montage, rhythmic flashes of street scenes, and periodic prismatic distortions are compared to the operations of gears, pistons, and flywheels. Each of the movements of both the tenor and vehicle defines a shallow or a flat space of performance. Even the loop of the woman climbing the stairs with her wash confines her repeated efforts to the same two or three steps in the flight, as if a very limited depth were open to her in the potential field.

Le Ballet Mécanique is a *tour de force* of rhythmic and spatial strategies. Two are particularly interesting within the scope of this chapter. It was one of the first films to employ the rapid intercutting of static scenes to give the impression of motion—a hat stretching out to a shoe or a triangle jumping into the shape of a circle—and perhaps the very first to combine fragments of actual motion into purely rhythmic figures. It was certainly the pioneer in combining both these tactics to render three-dimensional images flat to the eye by means of the speed with which they pass on the screen. Both Breer and Kubelka are the heirs of this strategy as much as of the formal intricacies of the films of Eggeling and Richter.

The second formal operation of importance to us derives from Cubist painting. It is the incorporation of printed texts to present the literal flatness of reading within the framework of conflicting, diminished depths.

Clement Greenberg has described the function of printing within the context of Cubist painting and collage:

> [Braque] discovered that *trompe-l'oeil* could be used to undeceive as well as to deceive with. It could be used, that is, to declare as well as to deny the actual surface. If the actuality of the surface—its real, physical flatness—could be indicated explicitly enough in certain places, it would be distinguished and separated from everything else the surface contained. . . .
>
> The first and, until the advent of pasted paper, the most important device that Braque discovered for indicating and separating the surface was imitation printing, which automatically evokes a literal flatness. . . . Only in the next year [1911] are block capitals, along with lower case numerals, introduced in exact simulation of printing and stenciling, in absolute frontality and outside the representational context of the picture.[1]

Léger introduced the same dimension to film when he showed a title, "ON A VOLE UN COLLIER DE PERLES DE 5 MILLIONS," which as we read it makes us forget the fact that it must have been placed a certain distance from the camera in order to be filmed. It seems as if the words lie on top of the actual screen. But when he swings the camera back and forth in front of the sign, we are forced to experience that depth.

Marcel Duchamp refined the same principle in his *Anémic Cinéma* (1927). He slowly intercut centered shots of rotating wheels with spiral lines on them and wheels with puns printed spirally. The lines generated optical illusions of depth into and out of the screen surface when they turned. But the sentences remain perfectly flat because they are read.

Breer made very little use of printed texts for this purpose; Kubelka none at all. But later artists of the graphic film made it a cornerstone of the participatory film, an outgrowth of the structural film which often overlaps with the graphic.

Robert Breer's first film, *Form Phases I* (1952), comes directly out of the tradition of Richter and Eggeling. A black rectangle rests in the center of the screen with a white rim around it. All of the animation occurs within the black space. Lines appear, intersect, and spread to the edges of the blackness. A consistent rhythm of frozen and moving figures establishes the following pattern: the lines slowly move to a fixed form; then that form holds still for a few seconds and cuts abruptly to another frozen figure; after that is held for the same amount of time, it slowly changes, freezes, cuts to another figure, etc. The alternation of changing lines with collisions of still shapes determines the structure of this very short film. In the course of its evolution the black rectangle loses its reductive shape; the changing lines leak over into the white border, diminish the edges of the rectangle into curves, and carve sections from it.

Breer described the background of his first film in an interview with Guy Coté:

> First, I was a painter. In Paris, I was influenced by the geometric abstractions of the neo-plasticians, following Mondrian and Kandinsky. It was big at that time, and I began painting that way. My canvasses were limited to three or four forms, each one hard-edged and having its own definite color. It was a rather severe kind of abstraction, but already in certain ways I had begun to give my work a dynamic element which showed that I was not entirely at home within the strict limits of neo-plasticism. Also, the notion of absolute formal values seemed at odds with the number of variations I could develop around a single theme and I became interested in change itself and finally in cinema as a means of exploring this further. I wanted to see if I could possibly control a range of variations in a single composition. You can see that I sort of backed into cinema since my main concern was with static forms. In fact, I was even a bit annoyed at first when I ran into the problems of movement.[2]

Later in the same interview he unfolds the heart of his first film when he says of all his work, "I'm interested in the domain between motion and still pictures." The cuts of *Form Phases I* take place between still figures, often the mirror images of each other, and the motion variations are bracketed by the static poles of *arche* and *telos*, the beginning from which and the end to which lines move. The realms between stillness and motion remain the object of almost all of Breer's explorations in cinema. He came quickly to a heightened awareness of the operation of the single frame as the locus of the tension between the static and the moving.

In *Form Phases II* (1953) the fastest shots are three frames long in a color animation of evolving and freezing hard-edged shapes in both reciprocal and uncoordinated movements. Reversing and varying the reductive screen-within-the-screen of his first film, he placed a thin black border, sometimes thicker on the left, sometimes on the right, around an almost completely white rectangle in the center. In the middle of the film, still another reduction of the screen shape, a small rectangle with blue diagonal stripes, appears and enlarges to the edges of the frames as the diagonals come loose and descend across the screen in waving blue lines. The final and most interesting tactic for generating forms out of the given shape of the screen is the use of a black dot which moves just within the edges of the white, black-bordered space, defining its limits.

The following year he made a loop, *Image by Images I* (1954), composed entirely of shots only one frame long. Of course, every animated film is made by shooting one frame at a time. But conventionally only tiny variations in the shape and position of images are permitted by animators to give the illusion of a continuous naturalistic motion. Breer's invention

was to abolish all of the slight variations and to project a continuously repeating strip of film in which each frame was essentially independent of the others. Thus any sense of continuous movement would have to be replaced by a more general notion of rapid change, an affirmation of the static in the center of the greatest speed that cinema affords. Furthermore, the endless loop confirms the stasis of the individual frames by repeating them at fixed intervals.

The same year that he experimented with the loop of *Image by Images I*, Breer made his first collage film, *Un Miracle* (1954), in collaboration with Pontus Hulten. It animates Pope Pius XII in a gesture of benediction from the Vatican balcony so that first he seems to be juggling a series of balls and then his own head. The film is only thirty seconds long. It is, however, the first manifestation of a second strain in Breer's work which runs parallel to his formalism throughout the 1950s and dominates his work in the early 1960s—the humorous cartoon.

The first film (as opposed to a loop), in which he employed the single-frame changes of *Image by Images I* was *Image by Images IV* (1956). It is not a strictly single-frame film, as none of Breer's have been in toto since the original experiment: single-frame variations on line figures, both open and closed into geometrical shapes, numbers, and flickering colors collide with graceful continuous lines, with movements in clusters that are repeated several times with variations. For the first time, he gave this film a soundtrack: rapid sputtering noises similar to, if not actually sprocket holes passing the sound reader.

Retreating temporarily from his investigations of high-speed imagery, he made *Motion Pictures* (1956) the same year. In a filmography he described it as an "evolution of forms derived from the author's paintings." Against a black field, constantly changing colored strips of paper cross the screen, meet each other, and deflect at angles. Each encounter of two edges of the paper creates a possible transformation of direction, angle, color, and scale. At one point he modifies the texture of his materials by using a thick white paper towel. This time the soundtrack is made up of discontinuous sounds of a violin. *Motion Pictures* remained the most elaborate of Breer's achievements in the strict tradition of Eggeling and Richter.

With his next film, *Recreation I* (1956–1957), Breer made his first major contribution to the alternative graphic film tradition, that of Léger and *Le Ballet Mécanique*. Here he elaborated the single-frame technique of *Image by Images I* and *IV* into a complex micro-rhythmic form, with the fastest possible stretches of imagery (single-frame sequences) interrupted by and evolving into just slightly longer shots of a few frames. The speed of the alternations tends to flatten the appearance of objects in the single-frame shots so that they expand into a somewhat deeper space when the merest extension of their duration occurs. Besides the hundreds of successive shifts in degrees of shallow depth, there is a coordinated tension between the stasis of the single frames and the minute, fragmented figures in motion when brief continuities occur.

Along with collages of colored paper, a moire pattern, and a piece of typewritten paper, *Recreation I* uses numerous solid objects of differing degrees of depth: buttons, a mechanical mouse, a jackknife, plastic film reels, a glove, a cat, string, the animator's hand, and most strikingly, a wad of paper expanding after compression. Almost all of the images appear twice, but not in a symmetrical pattern; often they are inverted and the number of frames allocated to them is not the same for each appearance. The effect of these numerous variations within a very limited range of depths and durations is to create a dense pattern of interlocking and incomplete rhythms accented by slight, discontinuous movements within the frame which the eye can organize into a complex unity.

Noel Burch, who wrote and speaks the run-on punning French speech which accompanies the film like a Dadaist commentary, accurately compared the total impression of this film to the collages of Kurt Schwitters.[3] Breer himself made a statement about the structure he generally prefers for his films, which is particularly appropriate here:

> I think of film as a "space image" which is presented for a certain length of time. As with a painting, the image must submit to the subjective projection of the viewer and undergo a certain modification. Even a static painting has a certain time dimension, determined by the viewer to suit his needs and wishes. In film, the period of looking is determined by the artist and imposed on the spectator, his captive audience. A painting can be "taken in" immediately, that is, it is present in its total self at all times. My approach to film is that of a painter—that is, I try to present the total image right away, and the images following are merely other aspects of and equivalent to the first and final image. Thus the whole work is constantly presented from beginning to end and, though in constant transformation, is at all times its total self. Obviously, then, there is no denouement, no gradual revelation except for constantly changing aspects of the statement, in the same manner in which a painting is subjectively modified during viewing.[4]

In an article on the cinema, called "A New Realism—The Object," which equates "the realism of the cinema" with "the possibilities of the fragment or element," Fernand Léger calls for a new kind of film-maker:

> New men are needed—men who have acquired a new sensitiveness toward the object and its image. An object for instance if projected for 20 seconds is given its full value—projected 30 seconds it becomes negative.[5]

In *Recreation I* Breer took up the challenge of Léger, but in a direction of heightened speed that the maker of *Le Ballet Mécanique* had not quite anticipated.

In an interview Breer stated:

> I started in Europe and I feel that my orientation was somewhat European. As a painter I was working out of Bauhaus traditions while Abstract Expressionism was getting going here, you know, coming out of Surrealism. . . . It's true that my films had their roots in European experimentation of the Twenties. . . . Another European aspect of my work might be that it is more conventionalized than that of the Americans. The Abstract Expressionists, and so forth, were working in a sort of anti-conventional way, trying for direct expression, while I was happy working out of conventions. I like this idea of limitations which you break all the time. The limitations have to be there, if they're self-imposed or if they come through some kind of historical inheritance, as mine are. I'd set up conventions on a film and then play with those within them.[6]

The first part of this statement is a lucid appraisal of the difference between his work and that of his American colleagues. His stance in regard to conventions has varied as his work has changed. The earliest films he made, between 1952 and 1957, grew out of the norms of geometrical painting into those of the graphic film, with important modifications of both. But beginning with *A Man and His Dog Out for Air* (1957), he made animated cartoons until 1964. They include *Inner and Outer Space* (1960), *Horse Over Teakettle* (1962), *Breathing* (1963), and the climactic *Fist Fight* (1964), in which cartooning broke up and led back to the fast motion cinema of his earlier works.

In the cartoon films there is a shift in his working process. Instead of creating the film directly in front of the camera as he was shooting it, he began to draw the lines and figures of individual frames on paper and cards. By flipping through the cards he could approximate the experience of the film. The actual shooting became more of an exercise in translation than creation. In an interview with Jonas Mekas, he spoke of *Recreation* as having been made

> in a kind of deliberate feeling of wonderment: "What the hell will this look like?" you know, that kind of thing, and "I don't want to know . . . whether this is cinema or not; it doesn't matter." Then I would go back and try to incorporate some notions of control and construction.[7]

By introducing the middle step of creation on cards, he refined his animation but diminished the dynamics achieved in his first works.

The weight of his interests as an artist lies in the creation and breakdown of illusions. This, he seems to believe, becomes clearest when the materials of the illusions are depersonalized (and demythologized), or as he has said, "conventional." A letter about his undeveloped interests in

three-dimensional films (inspired by a three-dimensional shadow play of Ken Jacobs) led to a discussion of his general aspirations in making art:

> It has to do with revealing the artifices instead of concealing them. The fact of that rabbit sitting inside the magician's hat is the real mystery, not how it's dissimulated. The hat should be transparent and show the rabbit.
>
> So it's again the threshold area that defines the form. Thresholds for my own exploration have been:
>
> 1. The fusion of stills into flowing motion and back again (flip cards, collage film, sculpture).
> 2. Transition from literary convention to other—i.e., abstraction and back again (collage films—Pat's B'day).
> 3. Transition from subconscious to conscious awareness—i.e., slow motion sculpture, fast paced film.
> 4. Transition from 2D to 3D—transparent mutoscopes and cut out sculpted mutoscopes—rotating bent wires.[8]

Naturally the notion of the "threshold" is more vital to Breer's aesthetic than that of "conventions." Conventions are, in fact, a means for him to come upon a threshold more immediately. Of the four realms of exploration, the first is the most important; for it extends throughout his work and tends to encompass the other three. In *Jamestown Baloos* (1957) and *Eyewash* (1959), he integrated the techniques of his earliest animations with those of *Recreation I* in a process of questioning and defining the boundaries between still and moving images, and the corollary distinction between "actualities" and flat pictures.

Jamestown Baloos jarringly juxtaposes all of his previous techniques and aesthetic strategies and invents a few more. The film has a triptych form of two black-and-white sections with martial soundtracks bracketing a silent one in color. In changes of tempo from very rapid to moderately slow and back again, he switches from the hand-drawn outline of a figure or an object to a magazine collage of that figure or the object itself. In all three parts he mixes satiric collages of Napoleon and the instruments of warfare with glimpses of landscapes and abstract textures and geometries, but he keeps the film in an unresolved suspense by subverting the viewer's psychological urge to fix one of these elements as the central theme and reduce the other two to sub-themes.

The transitions between themes within the three sections revolve around thresholds between motion and stillness. A series of watercolors, each on the screen for three or four frames, vibrates before the lens as if they were quickly shaken by hand. Collage gondolas move against static cityscapes of Venice. Then a barrage of single-frame landscapes by old masters rushes across the screen. They are arranged so that a tree or an image in one occupies approximately the same place in the next, giving a

sense of continuity amid violent change. Finally Breer incorporates very short shots of actual landscapes, whose spatial expanses are revealed in fragmentation by a few panning frames after or before a brief hold. The mesh of flat work and photography in depth, with the pronounced accent on the former, is so fine and subtle that the film does not lose its carefully balanced tension in these transitions.

Most of *Eyewash* derives from photography of actual entities rather than from collages, drawings, or flat photographs. Reflections of light on water, blurred fast panning motions, passing trucks filmed through a telephoto lens, a rolling ball, single-frame street scenes, and a humorous and exciting shot of a workman just at the point of sawing through a blue plank, are the crucial images here. Breer cuts on motion, shifting depths, speeds, colors, and directions in the shot-to-shot junctures, while he organizes the whole film in terms of repeated images and waves of rhythmic intensity and relaxation. *Eyewash* anticipates many of Stan Brakhage's *Songs*, made a decade later, but it lacks the visionary coherence and passionate commitment that Brakhage with the advantage of ten years of development was able to bring to his materials. More than any other film of Breer's, this one recalls the strategies of *Le Ballet Mécanique*, especially when Léger moves out of his studio and organizes his glimpses of Paris into a chain of associations.

With *Eyewash* Breer ended his work in defining the threshold between flat animation and photographed actuality by means of freezes and movements fractions of a second long. He would return to the combination of both types of imagery in *Fist Fight* (1964) but through utterly different means. Most of his subsequent cinema in the sixties was flatwork, with two significant exceptions, *Hommage to Jean Tinguely's Hommage to New York* (1960) and *Pat's Birthday* (1962), both studies of the work of other artists for whom he had an affinity, Jean Tinguely and Claes Oldenburg. After finishing *Eyewash*, Breer moved back to the United States. His return coincided with the decline of Abstract Expressionism as the dominant movement in American painting and slightly preceded the emergence of Pop Art. Tinguely and Oldenburg are both makers of comic objects, toward which they maintain a psychological distance alien to the Romantic commitment of the Abstract Expressionists to their works. It seems natural then that they are the artists toward whom he would gravitate and with whom he would associate. The two films on these artists represent the severest deviation from his Parisian work.

Breer had introduced cartoon elements into several of his early films, especially *Cats* (1956) and *Par Avion* (1957). But after his return to America the cartoon dimension grew as his concern with radical speed diminished but did not disappear. In *Horse Over Teakettle* (1962) he directly attacked the conventions of the cartoon while working within it. There he stuck to colored crayon drawings of a woman with an umbrella, a frog, and other easily identifiable creatures and objects. However, he transforms

and moves these conventional figures within an intricate orchestration of expectations and surprises involving changes of scale, direction, virtual depth, and above all movement off the screen at all four edges.

Of the American films he made before *Fist Fight*, only *Blazes* (1961) touches upon his central concern with the border in cinema between motion and stillness. Here he painted one hundred cards with bold, free-drawn shapes and rough calligraphic lines; then he shuffled them and photographed them in irregular alternations of one and two frames each. With each shuffling he varied the rhythm of durations. There are short sections in which two images flicker between each other in single-frame changes; there are also single frames inserted after twenty of blackness, and some are held up to half a second on the screen. In the end he zooms in on a series of cards with three or four frames for each movement. A loud clicking sound gives an auditory equivalent to the rush of similar and recurrent designs before the eyes.

At the same time he translated his principles of animation into sculpture. By hand-cranking his mutoscopes of slightly varied cards, the observer could control the degree of stillness or motion and thus provide himself with the illusion of continuous change or destroy that illusion. The mutoscopes also provided a means of breaking down the theatrical situation of cinema, which Breer has always held in suspicion. In two interviews he said:

> I got disoriented by the theatrical situation of film, by the fact that you have to turn out the lights and there is a fixed audience, and when you turn out the lights you turn on the projection light and you project the piece of magic on the wall. I felt that this very dramatic, theatrical situation in some ways, just by the environment of the movie house, robbed some of the mystery of film from itself. The idea to make mutoscopes was to bring movies again into a gallery situation, where I can have a concrete object, which gave this mysterious result in motion.
>
> All my art ideas have to do with material I was using. . . . I wanted to examine it more closely, and bring it into the open, to expose it.[9]

In the middle of the decade, Breer's sculptural work shifted from making mutoscopes to constructing objects that moved so slowly that they would seem stationary when directly observed, but when ignored for a period of time their shift of location would be obvious. At the same time, the dimensions of the single frame re-emerged in his films with increased vigor and purity.

Fist Fight, unlike any other of Breer's films, is autobiographical. In it he contemplates and manipulates "still" images from his past in what is apparently a moving family album. Black-and-white photographs of his wife as a girl, of himself at his work table, of children, a wedding party,

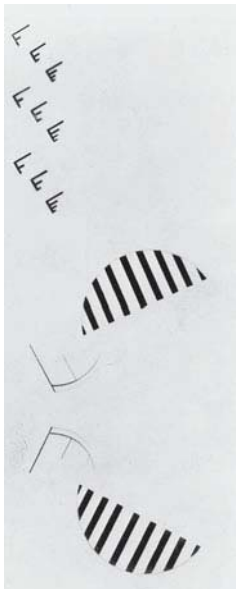
and many friends and personal scenes are scrambled together with fragments of cartoons (including a quotation from *Horse Over Teakettle*), a handwritten letter passing too fast to be legible, fingers, a bare foot, a mouse in a cartoon trying to turn on a lamp, and a real mouse falling through black space—to isolate a few of the more striking images.

By treating the photographs as he had the geometrical shapes of his earlier animations, Breer seems to be trying to distance himself from these images of his life. The personal material blends into the animations and fragments without assuming a privileged emphasis. At times it seems as if they were not personal pictures at all, but simply the most convenient photographs for a film intensely determined to explore further ambiguities of stillness and motion, painterly surface and illusory depth.

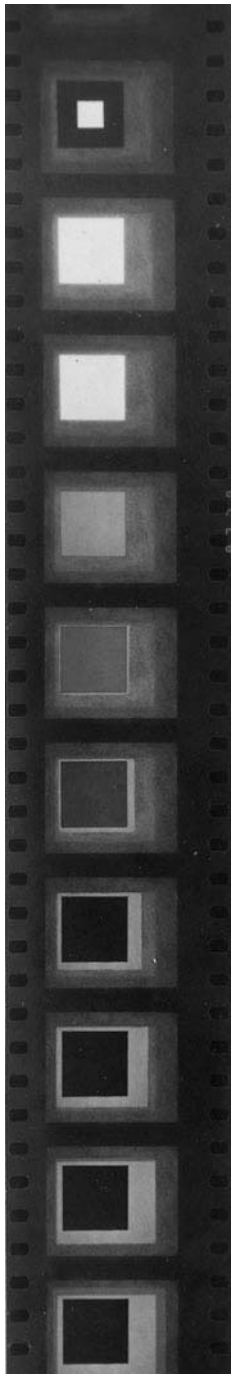
The film articulates itself in bursts separated by sections of blackness. In each burst a technique or series of images may dominate or provide a matrix, but all the elements (photographs, cartoons, abstractions) occur in each cluster. At first the flickering alternation of photographs and later the cartoon elements seem to be the center of concentration, yet the film resists giving a sense of development. In a note for *Pat's Birthday*, Breer had written, "Why things happen after each other in this film is because there isn't room for everything at once. But it's really a still picture and time is not supposed to move in one direction any more than it does in the other."[10] Although he does end that film with a recapitulation in brief shots of the actions already seen, *Pat's Birthday* follows the course of a day's outing, but in *Fist Fight* the tension between the human lives schematically depicted in the photographs and the recurrent bursts of images comes closer to the atemporality he claimed for the earlier film. Since *Fist Fight*, at eleven minutes, is the longest of Breer's films after the leisurely paced thirteen minutes of *Pat's Birthday*, it takes on a quality of duration foreign to his earlier work; some of the image clusters seem as long and as integral as *Recreation* or *Blazes*.

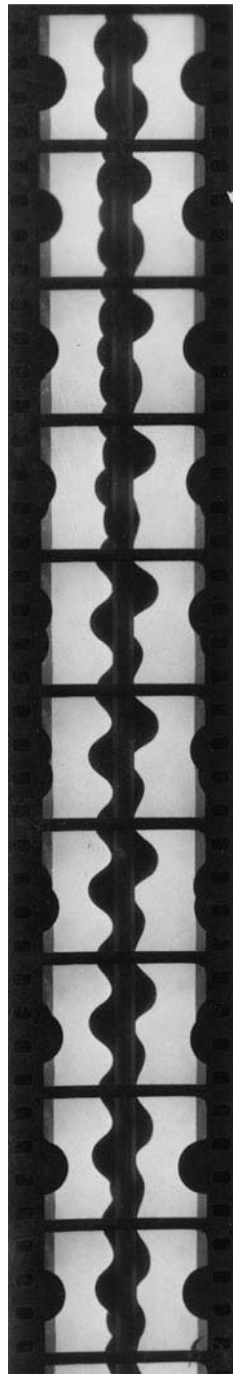
Had Breer chosen to use the penultimate scene as the last, it would have resolved the tensions he elaborated earlier. In that section, he wrenched the camera off the animation table while it was still running. Then he walked out of his studio with it, filming the walls and his shoes as he went, until he was in the open and could photograph the sun. By returning to the bursts of animation and photographs after this gesture, he further maintained the equilibrium of the phrases and qualified the most expressionistic moment to occur in his cinema.

After *Fist Fight* Breer made three remarkably controlled animated films which return to the forms and themes of his earliest work but with more power and confidence than ever before. These three closely related films, *66* (1966), *69* (1969), and *70* (1970), place Breer for the first time among the major colorists of the avant-garde. Each film sets itself a clearly defined problem involving color, speed, illusion, and image-shape, and even though they are unquestionably units of a series, they do not overlap or borrow from each other. Each fully satisfies its own postulated conditions



(a)





(b)

(a) The graphic cinema: sequential strips from Viking Eggeling's *Symphonie Diagonale* (not consecutive frames).
(b) Sequential strips from Hans Richter's *Rhythmus 21*.
(c) Robert Breer's *Recreation*.
(d) Peter Kubelka's *Schwechater*.
(e) Peter Kubelka's *Schwechater*.

(c)

(d)

(e)

of operation; seen together they clarify the subtle problems the film-maker has posed for cinema.

In *Recreation* and *Blazes* the film-maker had explored the speeding up of perception through extended series of single frames of essentially different images strung together. In *66* he made the single frame seem to move faster by injecting it into a static, long-held, geometrical composition. When the eye is confronted by a cluster of different single-frame shots, it adjusts to seeing each of them. As the adjustment succeeds, the $1/24$ of a second seems to grow longer. But when the eye relaxes on a continuous image, the sudden insertion of a single frame of something different seems much faster.

In *66* Breer deals with the problem of color in terms of the problem of speed of perception. He made a series of colored cards by cutting and applying shapes of zippetone, a highly reflective plastic tape. When filmed, the zippetone colors create evener and more vibrant hues than photographed surfaces that have been painted or colored by crayon. Breer's central strategy in this film was to place a colored shape with a white background on the screen for several seconds, then to interrupt it with another, usually smaller shape of a different color placed in what would be the background area of the initial image. The difference of color and the eccentricity of placement of the single-frame shot tended to cause a slight visual overtone when the first image reappeared.

Breer's next film, *69*, deals directly with depth illusions and achieves its color effects by almost completely reducing the film to black-and-white. The background for shapes is again white, except when the film slowly fades toward dark gray or tints the whole surface blue. Against this whiteness the outline figures of a hexagonal column, a wheel, a beam, and a door seem to sweep onto the screen from an offscreen axis and move through the screen's cubic space in depth. The column, which is the first and the pace-setting form, cuts through the lower left-hand edge of the frame and disappears in depth as if it sliced through our field of vision for a section of its circular movement. The door appears to swing inward from a base at the bottom of the screen. The plank moves like the column, but outward, hinged at the lower right, and the wheel alone crosses the screen horizontally without emerging or receding in depth.

The film derives its major rhythm from the pacing of these four periodic movements. At first they are intercut in different combinations. At their most intense, all four flicker together with one frame apiece. This not only retards their motion by four times; it destroys the illusion of depth by permitting the eye to register each position as a flat drawing. The dialogue between the literal flatness of the screen and its illusory depth takes on a further dimension when a series of flat-line forms and simple shapes make rapidly disappearing configurations in the center of the screen while the three-dimensional illusions continue to operate from the edges. At his most complex, Breer lets us see smooth movements in depth and affir-

mations of the flatness of the screen at the same time in flickering changes and in juxtaposition.

Breer transformed the geometry and intensified the colors of *69* in his next film, *70*. Here he used spray paint, which spreads over his white cards as a borderless affirmation of pure color, as well as bounded solid colors. He complemented the shapelessness of the sprayed cards with a play between hard-edged and soft forms throughout the film. In its first few seconds, he reveals his approach to color and shape separately. A series of sprayed cards passes in single-frame changes. Then, in two-frame shots, an amorphous shape, more like a hole, moves across the screen, alternately white on gray and gray on white. The pure colors pass again, this time in five-frame holds. Lastly, the hole reappears, constantly changing colors and switching whiteness from figure to ground.

Rotating tubes cut through sections of deep space; triangles and rectangles revolve, turning upon the upper and lower horizontals of the frame as axes. As they overlap, the areas they hold in common take on new colors at the same two-frame rate of change that rushes all shapes within the film through the spectrum. This illusory depth is complicated by the intermeshing of a second geometry of centric circles with their own color flicker.

Solid colors in rapid alternation tend to lose their vibrancy. They blend toward whiteness. Breer utilized this paling effect in *69* where color intensities were low and subtle. In *70* he regained some of the saturation of *66* with the use of the spray paints and the two-frame, rather than single-frame rhythm. Furthermore, the five-frame holds of pure colors near the beginning of the film set up an anticipation of color textures which focuses the attention on both the rapid exchange of geometrical solids in the middle and the blue gradations of sprays at the end.

In these three films Breer for the first time joined Harry Smith, Jordan Belson, and Bruce Baillie as one of the chief colorists of the American avant-garde film.[11] He did so by formulating in a new way, and out of impulses that extend back to his earliest films, a dialogue between color and shape, which, in the different ways I have noted, lies behind each of these film-makers' achievements in color film.

The film career of Peter Kubelka[12] runs parallel to that of Robert Breer. There is no evidence that they knew of each other's work until the second Experimental Film Competition in Brussels (1958), by which time their basic approaches to film had crystallized. On the superficial level, these two film-makers seem to have very little in common. Breer has worked primarily in different forms of animation; Kubelka never has. Breer's cinema is intimately related to his work as a painter and sculptor; film-making was the only art Kubelka practiced until he took up music in the 1970s. Breer is not a polemicist; in his occasional interviews he is casual about theoretical concerns and exceptionally modest about his own films. Kubelka has become the most determined theoretician within the avant-garde

cinema since Stan Brakhage; he is also a fierce exponent of his own originality, priority, and purity of influence (which, I must add, extends to a rejection as critical fantasy of any effort to compare him with Breer or any other avant-garde film-maker). Finally, Kubelka's films do not look at all like Breer's.

Their works quite unintentionally make two fundamental points: they define through their parallel careers the course of the late graphic cinema as it developed outside the evolution of the Romantic avant-garde film in America, and they provide a backdrop against which that evolution becomes clearer and more surely proven. Since they encountered the American avant-garde film as mature artists rather than in their formative periods, we would expect to see very little of its influence in their work.

Between 1954 and 1966 Peter Kubelka finished five films which together amount to a little more than a half hour of screen time. The first, *Mosaik im Vertrauen* (1954–1955) and the most recent, *Unsere Afrikareise* (1961–1966), bracket the three graphic films he made between 1957 and 1960. The first film is so closely related to the last, and rather different from the middle three, that I shall postpone discussion of it until I have treated the graphic films.

Before he made *Mosaik im Vertrauen* he had attended a term at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematographia in Rome, and despite their conservatism and hostility to his work, he completed his studies there in the mid-1950s. By 1963 he had become thoroughly familiar with the history of the cinema. It was at that time that he founded the Oesterreichesches Filmmuseum with Peter Konlechner, of which they remained co-curators until their retirement in 2001. How conscious he was of the graphic film tradition of the 1920s, through its major works or through its influences, is uncertain. Nevertheless, three of his films—*Adebar* (1957), *Schwechater* (1958), and *Arnulf Rainer* (1958–1960)—respond with progressively severe reductions to the structure of Eggeling's *Symphonie Diagonale* and the illusionist dialectics and handling of motion in Léger's *Le Ballet Mécanique*, Duchamp's *Anémic Cinéma*, and above all in Len Lye's kinetic films.

For instance, Lye's *Rainbow Dance* utilized high-contrast freeze-frames, which Lye used as color separators, and *Trade Tattoo* included brief figures of movement made abstract by ellipsis and cutting-on rhythm. Kubelka employs both of these strategies in a rigidly deductive form in *Adebar*. When he gave a seminar on his films at New York University in the spring of 1972 (the first public and extensive expression of his theoretical position), he listed the following laws as the ordering principles of his film: (1) each shot is 13, 26, or 52 frames long; (2) the first and last frame of every shot has been frozen at 13, 26, or 52 frames; (3) there is a change from positive to negative or the opposite at each splice; (4) the sound is a loop of music made by Pygmies, with four phrases each 26 frames long; and (5) when every possible combination of shots has been exhausted, the film ends.

The subject matter of *Adebar* is dancing. In fact, like all of Kubelka's films, it was a commission; in this case as an advertisement for the Cafe Adebar in Vienna. The dancers were filmed against a white wall with strong back lighting, so that in the positive shots they seem like shadows. The only guide to their depth is the eclipsing of rear dancers by those in the foreground in the two shots perpendicular to the camera. Otherwise the images look almost flat.

I have been able to distinguish six movements: a couple dancing, a woman twirling under a man's arm, a mass of dancing legs, several people rocking with their hands at their hips, and two different shots of couples dancing along a line of depth from the camera. Furthermore, there are two still shots without any intervening movement, which are almost identical. They always appear juxtaposed with negative-positive alternations. When questioned by an attentive student about these repetitions, Kubelka said it was the exception to his rules and that the two still shots, each thirteen frames long, function as a single unit. There are 64 changes of shot in the film. If Kubelka means each of the three elements of a shot (freeze, action, freeze) in positive and negative must combine with every other possible element, there would have to be hundreds of shots in the film. Like Webern's densest compositions, this film of Kubelka's gives the impression of a strictly rational genesis, but it does not make its principles evident to the perceiver.

Here lies the fundamental distinction between the form of Kubelka's graphic films and the structural cinema, whose precursor he has claimed to be. In his films he hides his orderly principles by multiplying and interchanging them. The films move so fast and are so complex that the viewer perceives their order without being aware of the laws behind them. Thus for the viewer the experience of *Adebar, Schwechater*, or *Arnulf Rainer*, is on the formal level not fundamentally different from that of a Brakhage film, even though the principles governing Kubelka's editing are rational and Brakhage's intuitive. The structural cinema, on the other hand, depends upon the viewer's ability to grasp the total order of the film—its shape—and the principles which generate it while he is viewing it, as will be illustrated in chapter twelve of this book.

The result of *Adebar*'s laws is a form remarkably similar to Breer's *Form Phases*, where a design is frozen, slowly changed into a new frozen position, then jumps to a different static form and changes. Both films employ reverse field variations in some of the cuts between static holds. This similarity results from similar attempts at purifying the achievements of the early graphic cinema. Furthermore, both forms point to an aesthetic of the single frame as the crux of an investigation of the threshold between stillness and movement.

The fundamental principle of Kubelka's film theory is that there is no movement in cinema. Every frame is a still picture. In an interview with Jonas Mekas, he says:

> Cinema is not movement. This is the first thing. . . . Cinema is a projection of stills—which means images which do not move—in a very quick rhythm. And you can give the illusion of movement, of course, but this is a very special case, and the film was originally invented for this special case. . . .
>
> Where is, then, the articulation of cinema? Eisenstein, for example, said it's the collision of two shots. But it's very strange that nobody has ever said *it's not between shots but between frames*. It's between frames where cinema speaks. And then, when you have a roll of very weak collisions between frames—this is what I would call a shot, when one frame is very similar to the next frame.[13]

When he made *Adebar*, the film-maker had not yet clearly formulated this position. In that film the frozen image seems to act as a surrogate for the single frame, as he came to use it in his film of the following year, *Schwechater*.

The generative laws of *Schwechater* are much more complex. (1) The intercutting between black and images follows a repetitive pattern of one frame of black, one of an image, two black, two image, four black, four image, eight black, eight image, sixteen black, sixteen image; then it begins again with one black frame, etc. (2) There are 1440 frames in the film, equaling exactly one minute of screen time. (3) There are twelve passages of both image and leader tinted red for ninety continuous frames. These colored sections become progressively more frequent as the film moves toward its conclusion. (4) Two sounds, one low and the other high, occur during the red passages. (5) There are four different images within the film: (a) a woman sitting at a table while a hand pours beer into a glass before her; (b) a side-view of that woman drinking; (c) a group of people in a restaurant; (d) beer foaming in a champagne glass. Every other time one of these images, or as little as one frame from them, appears on the screen, it is negative. (6) Shots (a) and (b) follow an exceptionally complex rule: (a) is thirty frames long, (b) is ninety frames. These frames are considered as numbered units. Whenever Kubelka wants to use a part of shot (a), he must use that number corresponding to what its place would be in the film if the film were a simple loop. For instance, he can use the thirtieth frame from (a) as the thirtieth, sixtieth, ninetieth, etc., frame of his film. He can use the last frame of (b) as the ninetieth, 180th, etc., frame. Furthermore, he can use a given frame from these two shots only once. Whether its use is positive or negative is determined by the previous image from the same shot sequence.

In his lectures at New York University, the film-maker did not indicate by what rules he inserted parts of shots (c) or (d) or frames of white leader into the film. Nor did he indicate any law which determined how many frames of any shot he would use in the spaces provided by the first law. I assume these were to be subjective decisions.

In *Schwechater* there are many single-frame shots. No image extends for more than nine frames of what he would call "weak articulations." What we experience then when we look at *Schwechater* is a flickering, pulsating fragmentation of related gestures and movements syncopated with differing rhythms of blackness and a superimposed redness that is accented by sound. According to Kubelka, he created the structural image of fire and of a running brook through the montage of this film without recourse to images of flames or water deflected by rocks.

The purpose behind the elaborate sixth law was to sustain a sense of two simultaneous loops, one three times as long as the other, pulsing throughout the film. Its effect, however, is not quite that of a loop. The pouring and the drinking in *Schwechater* become analyzed, simultaneous motions. By intercutting them and mixing the other shots and leaders with them, Kubelka pushes them toward the condition of stasis, of which the single-frame image is the ultimate reduction. Like Breer's much later intermeshing of rotating geometrical forms in 69, rapid intercutting both flattens, slows down, and even momentarily freezes each of the illusory motions.

However, in his third graphic film Kubelka reached the extreme of his reductiveness. *Arnulf Rainer* is a montage of black-and-white leader with white sound (a mixture of all audible frequencies) and silence. For the filmmaker it is an evocation of the dawn, of day and night, of thunder and lightning. The formal laws which govern its construction are considerably more elaborate than those of either previous film, and they include a wide range of subjective decisions.

The composition of *Arnulf Rainer* is so complicated that none of its formal operations can be discovered by watching the film during a normal projection. Instead, one perceives an intricate pattern of synchronous clusters of flashes and explosions of sounds mixed with asynchronous patterns which evolve, recall, or anticipate other patterns on one of the two levels of sound and picture. At times the flickering of the black-and-white frames proceeds in silence, to be followed by the same or a similar rhythm on the soundtrack while the screen stays white or black. At a different moment the sound rhythm will forecast the visual pattern which appears in silence or with a different, and therefore not synchronized sound. The whole film is interwoven with such transfers of meter from sound to picture, or the opposite, in phrases that may be (according to Kubelka's notes) 288, 192, 144, 96, 72, 48, 36, 24, 18 16, 12, 9, 8, 6, 4, or 2 frames in duration. There are 16 sets of phrases, each one 576 frames long (24 seconds). Within each of the 16 sections except one, the metrical patterns accelerate their changes as the phrases move form the longest to the shortest in fixed stages. Since there are no distinct, visible boundaries between the sections or the phrases inside of the sections, this structure is vaguely perceived as a seemingly endless series of irregular accelerations. A psychological aftereffect helps to emphasize the subdivisions. After each wave of acceleration a transparent halo-like square seems to hover off the screen for a fraction

of a second. As the pattern of changes recommences, the floating image slowly (that is, slow within the terms of speed generated by the film itself) rejoins the actual screen. Many spectators find momentary illusions of color attend this effect. The force of the after-effect is to affirm the flatness and rectangularity of the screen almost every 24 seconds of the 6.4-minute film.

The one exception to this pattern is the sixth section, which is a black and silent pause for all 24 seconds. At first it seems as if the film has ended, but it recommences with full force. Kubelka proves here that even after an intense barrage of infinitesimal visual and aural variations, an extended series of "weak articulations" immediately begins to dissolve the heightened perception of frame-to-frame variations. In his criticism of Eisenstein's claim that the raw power of cinema resides in the collision between shots, Kubelka argued that the strongest collisions are between frames, that it is not the shots which collide but the last frame of one and the first frame of the other. He would have us dispense with the very notion of the shot. What we call shot, he points out, is a series of frames with weak articulations between them; that is, a frame is exactly or almost exactly like the previous one in a conventional shot. The illusion of a moving figure in a static field is a good example of weak articulation; the only difference between two frames is a slight change in the position of the figure. Thus for Kubelka film has an absolute limit of intensity: radical changes of picture and sound every $\frac{1}{24}$th of a second. This limit is one of the poles of *Arnulf Rainer*. The other is the long black pause, the extreme of weak articulation.

The film-makers who followed Kubelka in exploring the possibilities of the flicker film in either color or black-and-white have tended to conceive it differently. For Kubelka, *Arnulf Rainer* is the absolute film, the alpha and omega, which both defines and brackets the art. For the structural film-makers who use the flicker form, it is the vehicle for the attainment of subtle distinctions of cinematic stasis in the midst of extreme speed which can be presented so as to generate both psychological and apperceptive reactions in its spectators. Although Kubelka is not closing out the possibility of such reactions, he created his film as both a definition of cinema and a generator of rhythmical ecstasy.

The enigmatic titles, *Schwechater* and *Arnulf Rainer*, like *Adebar* before them, refer to the sponsors of the films. The former was originally commissioned as an advertisement for Schwechater beer. Kubelka even let the company dictate the images (the pseudo-elegant scene of models drinking beer as if it were champagne) in order to prove to them and to himself that cinema is not a matter of imagery but of frame-to-frame articulation. Arnulf Rainer, a Viennese painter and close friend of the film-maker, commissioned a portrait of himself and his work. In the course of making it, Kubelka became interested first in a film of pure colors, then one in black-and-white, sound and silence, alternations. He titled it as a dedication, and

perhaps as an apology for not completing the commission for which he was paid.[14]

Kubelka is the only film-maker I shall discuss in this book who affirms the absolute equality of importance between images and sound in cinema. Although the metrics of *Adebar* were determined by the fact that the sound phrases repeated in it are 26 frames long, and although the sounds of *Schwechater* are skillfully and integrally utilized as structural elements, neither of those films quite lives up to the extreme demands of the film-maker's aesthetic. But with *Arnulf Rainer* he succeeded in making a graphic film which gave equal importance to sound and visuals. However, it is in his first film, *Mosaik im Vertrauen* and in his most recent, *Unsere Afrikareise*, that his theories of sound montage are most fully developed.

Both films are organized around "synch events," to use his phrase. In his lectures at New York University and at Harpur college he contrasted ritualistic "synch events" in primitive societies with their cinematic employment.[15] He described his pleasure at witnessing an African festival in which a tribe silently watched the sun set. At the very instant that the red disk of the sun touched the horizon line, a drum-beat broke the silence and the ritual festivities began. The film-maker, he admits, cannot compete with the ritual shaman in the "sensuality of his materials," the real sun and the silent community. He must make do with a pale mimesis of the sun by the white screen or with photographed, secondary imagery. His advantages over the tribal shaman, however, are two: he can speed up the "synch events" from a maximum of one a day to 24 each second; he can also combine the sound of one occasion with the image from another. The first of these advantages he explored in *Arnulf Rainer*; the second in *Mosaik*, and more radically in *Unsere Afrikareise*.

The two films have comparable structures. A number of isolated events are spread through them, sometimes as parallel montage and at other times with illusions of sequential and logical connections. In the earlier film, groups of images form short scenes every time they recur, but in the later one, each shot, in the traditional sense, tends to be independent of the one before and after it, except through connections which the film-maker invented with kinetic and sound montage. A set of two or three sequential shots with the same subject or location would be the exception in this film.

The suspended elements of *Mosaik im Vertrauen* (Mosaic in Confidence) are (1) a documentary of an historic crash on the Le Mans raceway that killed several people; (2) a bum who helps a woman take in her laundry and then spends the night talking with workers in a railroad yard; (3) an elegant model-type, Michaela, and her chauffeur; (4) a cocky young man standing in a doorway with the woman who had earlier taken in the laundry; and (5) railroad imagery. This list does not exhaust the pictorial elements of the film.

The film weaves among these fragmented scenes mixing prolepses, flashbacks, ellipses, and synecdoches with illusions of temporal and spatial

interconnections in the following ways: very early in the film a single frame flash of a figure straddling railroad tracks, bent over and staring through his legs, anticipates a later hold on that image. Toward the end of the film, a flashback recalls the speech of the cocky youth to the woman: "You will eventually fall for me," he says. In the initial presentation of the scene she answers, "Do you really think so?" Earlier she had used the same expression to the bum helping her take in her wash. The flashback follows a scene of the model getting out of her car, which has also been inserted earlier during the initial doorway presentation. When her elegant shoe touches the ground, the "synch event" is a direct cut to the sight and sound of the racecar crashing at Le Mans; she twists her hips to a carefully placed fragment of music followed by the key word from the youth's speech, *"verfallen."* A repetition of that word brings with it a flashback to the couple in the doorway. The mesh of visual and aural associations in this brief section of the film is typical of its total construction.

The fragmentation and intertwining of scenes give *Mosaik* a structure similar to two contemporary, late trance films in America, Brakhage's *Reflections on Black* and even more so its model, Christopher MacLaine's *The End*. On a purely formal level, the rhetoric of Kubelka's cinematic conjunctions, whereby diverse strands of themes are fitted together, evolved toward a language of metaphor precisely parallel to independent developments in America. The essential distinction between the American work and his is the intensified Romantic inwardness of the American film in contrast to Kubelka's perspective as "an anthropologist" of the "Stone Age" aspects of contemporary man, to use two of the film-maker's favorite expressions. In his skeptical naturalism, he refuses a privileged perspective for himself; the artist, according to his conception, shows to his contemporaries and to posterity what life is and was like in the dark ages of his own time. "We are in fact very near brothers of the animals (let's say the mammals); we have made a more complicated society, but in their lives and loves they are approximately the same," he told an interviewer. "When I was 19 or so," he added, referring to the time immediately before making *Mosaik*,

> I had a period when I was wary of being a part of humanity, and I symbolically signed a declaration of my resignation from humanity—"Peter Kubelka"—but in fact you cannot do it without staying still and dying. Despite the beautiful moments, it's a horrible situation—I mean, we are some sort of growing thing on a round ball in this ridiculous, black universe, there's no purpose—it's a joke, anyway.[16]

For *Unsere Afrikareise* (Our Trip to Africa) Kubelka recorded about ten hours of sound—talk, animals, noises, bits of radio music, all either separate or combined—and a few hours of images while in Africa. When he returned to Vienna, he transcribed all the sounds phonetically, using

the techniques of symphonic scoring for passages of several kinds of sound. Then he memorized the book of his transcriptions. He also clipped three frames from every shot he had taken, mounted them on a card, and cross-indexed the cards in terms of rhythm, color, subject, and theme. The totality of pictures and sounds he collected he called his "vocabulary."

Like a poet he could then draw upon that vocabulary in the creative act of editing. One of Kubelka's fundamental principles is that a film must be reconceived between the shooting and the editing. The film-maker, he told his classes, should abandon any preconceptions he may have had while planning or shooting his film once it is shot. Then he must look freshly at his "vocabulary" to see what new form it might take. In the six years between shooting and finishing *Unsere Afrikareise*, that is what he did.

Kubelka isolated scenes with specific emotional vectors in order to reorganize them through sound and picture montage. He told Jonas Mekas:

> My films have a function (this goes for the African film)—I play with the emotions and try to tear the emotions loose from the people, so that they they would gain distance to their emotions, to their own feelings. This is one of my main tasks: to get distance to the whole existence, you see . . . I have a lot of distance. I always had it, and I have too much, so I feel very lonely and I want to communicate. You see, you have this whole range of emotions and these mechanisms, how the emotions are created. When you see certain images or hear certain sounds you have certain emotions. So I must always cry when I see moving scenes, when I see the hero getting the first prize for the biggest round and they play the national anthem . . . I have to cry . . . or when they bury somebody, I have to cry. At the same time, I am angry at myself, because I know that it's just the emotional mechanisms. So, with the African film. I do a lot of this, I trigger a lot of those mechanisms at the same time and create a lot of—at the same time—comic feelings, sad feelings.[17]

In this film Kubelka abandoned single-frame montage in order to create a seductive illusion of reality. He focuses the speed of perception on the instant-to-instant relationship between sound and image. Thus a passenger boat rising upward on the sea will be combined with a fragment of popular romantic music just long enough to initiate an emotional surge, or the movement of an insect among flowers will seem to dance when combined with a lively tune for a few seconds. He will synchronize a cliché of awe—"*Die ganze Erde . . . Die Erde ist terra*" (the whole earth . . . the earth is terra)—with a twist of the lens which radically shifts the focus from a close-up leaf to the full moon; a raucous explosion of laughter is joined to an image of a white woman mocking an African guard; the silent

Sphinx seems to be wondering, "What did we shoot last Tuesday?" in a "synch event."

These synthetic fragments become the "words," according to the filmmaker's own simile, with which he writes his film. They are combined in numerous ways, among which the commonest are (1) analogical elision, in which the action of one shot seems to continue incongruously into the next, as when the hand of a snake charmer tapping a boa is meshed with the hand of a hunter lighting a pipe for an African woman, (2) emotional antithesis—for example, the combination of the sad gaze of a dying lion with the dance of the insect in a flower, previously mentioned; (3) visual illustrations of a continuous sentence on the soundtrack, as in the ironic sequence of a horseman, flowing water, and a low aerial sweep over running animals accompanying the line, "We came by land, by ship, and by air"; (4) illusions of cause and effect, such as the hand of a hunter greeting Africans at screen right followed by a zebra's leg shaking toward screen left, as if the hunter were shaking hands with the fallen beast; and (5) the destruction of illusion, as in the following shot which shows why the zebra's leg was moving—it was being skinned.

Kubelka paid close attention to the slightest variations in rhythm within long shots, and he accented them by sound and editing. An example of this would be the African woman presumably pounding grain with a giant pestle. With each of her blows there is a synchronous groan. Sometimes he will let her establish a rhythm by making two or three blows without interruption; then he will cut at the very frame in which the pestle hits the block to the static head of a careass, so that the groan seems to come from the skeleton as if it had been hit on the head by the pestle. Again, the music which turned the insect's movement into a dance lends a terrible grace to the subsequent shot of Africans lifting the dead lion on to a car because their heaves are in the same close synchronization to the music that the insect's bounces had been.

The illusions of *Unsere Afrikareise*—offscreen looks connecting disjunctive scenes, cutting to the firing of guns, fusions of music and movement—are more dynamic than those of *Mosaik im Vertrauen* because they look as if they were discovered within the action (as they were) rather than preconceived and imposed upon it (as had been the case in his first film). In a film whose junctures, however radical, are preconceived, the changes of shot tend to be telescoped to the viewer, if only at the horizon of his awareness. Once such a juncture occurs it has the satisfying look of preconception, but it also allows the attention to relax slightly until the next telegraphing and satisfaction. By cutting his film according to imminent junctures as Brakhage and Markopoulos also tend to do, Kubelka keeps the attention close to the threshold of the single-frame event, probing the instant-to-instant unrolling of the film for internal rhythms and metaphorical lines from which new connections spring.

ten

Apocalypses and Picaresques

THE TRANSITION FROM the subjective and graphic cinema of the late 1940s to the mythopoeic cinema of the 1960s can be most clearly documented through the films of a number of independent film-makers working in relative isolation in the San Francisco area throughout the 1950s. The collapse of Art in Cinema meant, or at least coincided with, the dissolution of the community of film-makers. Where once films had been completed for the admittedly hostile audience of Art in Cinema at the San Francisco Museum of Fine Arts, now film-makers protected their isolation like hermits, often refusing to show their films to the few ephemeral groups that sprang up and soon disappeared throughout the country which were sincerely interested in viewing them. Both Harry Smith and Jordan Belson passed through periods of extreme artistic withdrawal, while Larry Jordan and Bruce Conner, significant figures of the subsequent generation,

held ambivalent attitudes toward the exhibition and distribution of their films.

The rejection of the social aspects of film production might be seen as part of the Beat ethos which affected in one way or another most of the artists in San Francisco at that time. Yet despite the attitude of the artists, the continuity of an aesthetic tradition spans the decade. The ironic mode of Sidney Peterson and especially James Broughton persists in the work of most of the artists to be discussed in this chapter. Christopher MacLaine, Ron Rice, Bruce Conner, and Robert Nelson (but not Larry Jordan)[1] found sufficient space within that ironic tradition to develop their unique styles. A persistent and pervading naïveté absent in the work of their predecessors often vitalizes their cinematic visions. Jordan, who shares a number of formal concerns with the four other film-makers listed above, has moved away from their oscillation between irony and apocalypse.

Christopher MacLaine's *The End* (1953) terminated the highly productive period of film-making in San Francisco that had begun with *The Potted Psalm*. When it was made, the avant-garde movement was already on the way to its first temporary dissolution. The film itself bursts with the rhetoric of finality; it is a deliberately conclusive work. Jordan Belson, who reluctantly photographed the film under MacLaine's direction, provides one link to the immediate cinematic past. The film leaves no room for the future. It forecasts the destruction of the world by atomic holocaust as the direct sequel to its projection.

The strident language of the narration of *The End* mixes the prophecy of immediate doom with nostalgia, as if the earth were already gone; descriptions of the film's characters which insist that these characters can never really be known (the phrase "for reasons we know nothing about" recurs periodically) shift to exhortations to the audience ("Ladies and gentlemen, we have asked you before to insert yourself into the cast. Now we ask you to write this story"). After a brief, frozen image of a mushroom cloud and the ironic opening title, "The End," the narrator expounds the thesis of the film as we sit in the blackness:

> Ladies and Gentlemen, soon we shall meet the cast. Observe them well. See if they are yourselves. And if you find them to be so, then insert yourself into this review; for such it is, a review of things human, a view of things past, a vision of a world no longer in existence, a city among cities gone down in fire; for the world will no longer exist after this day.

In six sections of varying degrees of narrative coherence, we see, and above all hear about, MacLaine's possessed characters. The first, Walter, has been rejected by his friends. We see him running purposelessly through streets, parks, down flights of stairs, until he is shot, unexpectedly. "For reasons we know nothing about," the narrator tells us as we see an unknown hand holding a pistol, "just at that moment, another man decided

to blow the head off the next person he saw. Our friend was that person." The scenes of Walter's running situate themselves in deep perspective, into which he flees or out of which he escapes. Often the empty staircase or street rests on the screen for a few seconds before the actor suddenly enters from an unanticipated direction to pursue his race along the receding line of perspective. Among these in-depth images of flight more enigmatic images are interspersed: street scenes, an arm with taut muscles, a tongue licking an ice-cream cone. Sometimes these shorter, intermediary images bear a direct or indirect relation to the narrative, as when the shadows of dancing people appear on a ceiling as the narrator refers to Walter's friends: "They went about their games . . . dancing the dance, and generally forgetting themselves quite admirably." But more often, these shots anticipate later episodes.

Synecdoche plays a major role in MacLaine's film, as does ellipsis. The combination of picture and sound at the conclusion of the next episode exemplifies the latter. Here Charles hides in doorways and fearfully makes his way through the city. We are informed that he has just killed his landlady and her daughter, and that he cannot bear to surrender himself to the police. The language of the section's end is vague: "Then he remembered a place he had often thought of before, and he walked toward it, still enjoying his walk. With his last dime, he removed himself from the threat of red tape and embarrassment, and the slate was already clean." Two elliptical images clarify this conclusion. First we see Charles pass through a ten-cent turnstile; then the camera pans up to the Golden Gate Bridge. In the combination of picture and sound, both indirect in themselves, we learn that he entered Golden Gate Park and jumped from the bridge.

Next, in presenting the suicide of John, a failed poet turned successful comedian, the film-maker uses several previously mysterious images as metaphors for his narrative. The texture of the metaphors is underlined by the arbitrary mixture of black-and-white shots in a predominantly color film. For instance, the black-and-white head of a sleeping bum is intercut with the color pictures of John's false friends, who calmly listen to his pre-suicide speech and applaud it as his best performance. When he leaves the room where, exclusively in close-ups, he had been talking and playing Russian roulette, the picture switches to black-and-white shots of hands playing a piano and a black man dancing. "Someone else took the floor, and John was forgotten. Applause went to the living." The suicide itself, before a brick wall on which "PRAY" has been painted, cuts from its colored details to these same black-and-white metaphors. The dying man's collapsing legs are compared to the dancer's; his dead body to that of the sleeping bum.

In the fourth section, in which Paul, a beautiful young man, decides to give himself to the ugliest of lepers to test the authenticity of love, color and black-and-white intermesh in the action itself. Scenes of Paul by the ocean are a mixture of both film stocks. The relationship between picture

and sound had become progressively more indirect in the three earlier episodes, with more and more of the burden of action falling on the words. Here we see Paul wandering by the sea in a garden of statues. He is playing his flute, and he finally walks into a public building; we are told that he will seek passage to a leper colony. But the apocalyptic vision of the opening speech of the film returns when the narrator says, "He will get about as far as the information desk. Then his time will be over, along with ours."

The process of abstraction on the visual level of the film reaches its apogee in the next episode. Here we are asked to create our own story. "Here is a character." We see a man in a red shirt, played by the filmmaker, throwing a knife into a board. "Here is the most beautiful music on earth." We hear Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. "Here are some pictures. What is happening?" The pictures include the façade of a house, a monumental archway, the tensed arm we had often seen before, and more shots of the man and his knife-throwing.

As if unable to tolerate the extremity of ambiguity with which he has confronted us, he begins to make a story for us with echoes of St. Paul on the road to Damascus:

> He is a good boy, but somehow we feel he is up to no good. Someone has hurt him. But he has got his ego back, and he will assert himself now. Someone is in the house. Why is he hesitating? Why is he going into the house? No, he will enter and destroy, perhaps? Listen, I know no more about the story than you do, but I know that at this point he was suddenly both blind and dumb, and he takes this as a message from somebody he'd better accept as Master, and walks away from the house and its occupant. Then the world and its music come back to him, and he hums a little song and hears an echo.

The camera frames a cross in the lower left-hand corner of the screen. Then as the Ode to Joy from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony is heard, we see puppets and human feet dancing to the music in images that had been proleptic flashes earlier in the film.

The tactic of telling more than one promises to tell or more even than one claims to know had been used earlier in the film toward a more pessimistic end. When the screen went black after the shooting of Walter, the narrator said:

> If there were only more time, we could have the story of the unhappy young man who decided to blow Walter's brains out on *his* last day. We could follow him through his tribulations in the courthouse, could follow him into solitary confinement; could sit with him while his head was being shaven as he lay whimpering and alone, confused and defeated. We could walk beside him

> down the gray and sanitary prison corridor toward the mercy we offer to those of us who run amok. We could watch through the window, when he strangles to death trying to catch a breath to say "mama." Well, we have not enough time for all of the stories. Let us go on. Maybe you will see yourself.

The narrator himself seems to be confused about whether there is not enough time to tell the stories or not enough time for the stories to happen; presumably Walter's killer will die with all of us in the immediate holocaust. The intentional confusion in the narrative reflects rhythmic alternations and paradoxes of gloom and optimism in the whole of the film. After the conversion in the middle of the fourth episode, the tone of the film suddenly becomes joyous. The final story, a pantomime of unsatisfied desire, does not end bitterly, nor does it have a verbal commentary. We see two figures on the beach—a young man trying to light a match as the waves are lapping over his hands, and a young woman who discovers two pipes which lose their bright colors as soon as she tries to puff on them. Eventually, they see each other and rush together, open-armed. But before they can make contact they fall next to each other writhing in the sand. This fable is resolved by the happy image of a woman riding a white horse in slow motion, intercut with a stream of water hitting a tree. The combination of these two images is the sensual climax of the film. It takes us far from the despair of the opening sections. But now that doom has been finally removed from the foreground of our attention, the atomic bomb explodes, a mushroom cloud rises, and the film ends in a shattering of the title, "The End."

The extraordinary ambition of *The End* looks forward to the great achievements of the mythopoeic film. MacLaine came to cinema a little too late to find conviction in the trance film. In *The End* he made his major statement through a form that could not contain it. Brakhage, during his first stay in San Francisco, saw *The End* in 1953, before it disappeared from sight for the next ten years. Two years later, perhaps under its influence, he too tried to get beyond the trance film by combining three episodes with a unifying theme in *Reflections on Black*. Later, after the first Film-Makers' Cooperative was founded, Brakhage sought out MacLaine and helped put his films into distribution. The formal achievements which make *The End* a fascinating work—the combination of color and black-and-white, the proleptic use of metaphor, the dialectic of doom and redemption—can be found in a more integrated and full achieved way in Brakhage's *Dog Star Man*. Furthermore, in *Blue Moses* Brakhage refined some of the tactics of direct address and indirect narration which in MacLaine's original, although they are brilliantly employed, are drowned in the naïve urgency of his statement.

After a hiatus of five years, we encounter the next significant achievement in the complex ironic tradition that extends from James Broughton through MacLaine. Bruce Conner made *A Movie* in 1958 as an extension

of his collage sculpture. Aside from the titles (which include a comically long hold on the film-maker's name), all the images of Conner's film were culled from old newsreels, documentaries, and fiction films. The natural irony of the collage film, which calls attention to the fact that each element quoted in the new synthesis was once part of another whole, thereby underlining its status as a piece of film, creates a distance between the image depicted and our experience of it. Montage is the mediator of collage. Conner extends that mediated distance by introducing bits of blank film, academy leader, and stray titles ("End of part four" or "The End" near the beginning of the film), as well as reintroducing the title he gave the whole—*A Movie*—and his name at several points in the middle of the montage.

Unlike MacLaine, Conner is not naïve in his vision of doom. Nor are the intellectual rhythms of *A Movie*, which move between the terrible and the ridiculous, part of a general interior drift, like the desperate but gradual postulation of hope before the finish of *The End*; Conner deliberately and carefully orchestrated the twists and changes of pace within his film. There is an early sequence which characterizes Conner's ambivalent manipulation of found images and which demonstrates his visionary stance at the same time. We see a submarine, the movement of whose periscope is intercut with a 1940s nudie film of Marilyn Monroe to suggest that the periscope operator is watching a peep-show. His excited reaction, which must originally have come while sighting an enemy ship, gets a laugh when we translate it to the voyeuristic context. The submarine fires a torpedo, continuing the sexual metaphor for comic effect while adding a hint of terror. The explosion of the torpedo becomes, through montage, an atomic bomb blast; the explosion puts the brake on our laughter with a moment of shock. The shock slowly wears off with the recognition of the visual grace of the mushroom cloud.

A sequence of dangerous stunts, which are comic because of their approach to disaster without actual harm, precedes a sequence of battles which are shocking in their deadly activity. Graceful images which only indirectly suggest the possibility of death (a tightrope walker, descending parachutes) shift the tension after an onslaught of horror. The final sequence of the film, derived from a Cousteau underwater documentary, provides a symbol for ironies and ambiguities upon which the whole collage is organized. Symbolism becomes possible only when the intensity of irony diminishes by becoming a second-degree distancing—the irony of an irony. Within the space of this distancing, a mediating figure represents us, the viewers, within the film. First the camera follows a school of fish. Then we see that this shot had been from the perspective of a scuba diver, our mediator, who, leaving the fish, discovers a sunken ship. Its wreckage has become beautiful through a covering of barnacles. The narrativity and the mystery of this sequence partially derive from the interspersing of pauses of black leader between the shots. Both qualities can enter the film only when the ironic pressure of viewing the individual shots as film gar-

bage suddenly diminishes. In the second-degree distancing, we simultaneously experience the mediation and realize we are watching film collage. The climax of the section creates a metaphor for this disjunction: as the diver descends into the hull of the ship the camera shoots upward at the sun reflected on the surface of the sea.

Conner's subsequent film, *Cosmic Ray* (1961), emphasizes the dynamic integration of visual materials over ideological montage. The method of this integration is the imposition of a rhythmical pulse on all shots in the film; the shots include academy leader, end titles, flashes, phrases such as "Head" or "Start," a nude female dancer—often in superimposition with flashing lights—and bits of old films (advertisements, cartoons, and especially war documentaries). Ray Charles, singing "Tell Me What I Say," reinforces the tempo of the montage with a rock beat on the soundtrack.

Four fragments of an old Mickey Mouse cartoon frame the climax of the film and provide its ironic center. The first image of Mickey gets a laugh from its sheer incongruity in a film elaborating a metaphor of sex and war. Next we see a huge cannon pointed at Mickey's head. When it fires, Conner cuts rapidly to anti-aircraft weapons and cannon firing from old documentaries. The phallic nature of all the guns is revealed by their context in the montage and by the illusions of the song text. The barrages of firing are the orgasmic center of the film. When the cartoon comes on again, the cannon suddenly wilts like an exhausted penis as the song calls out for "just one more time." As it began, *Cosmic Ray* ends in a welter of leader and flashes.

With his next film, *Report* (1965), the longest of the three, Conner returned to filmic assemblage (the dancer and the lights of *Cosmic Ray* had been photographed by him) and to the intense ambivalence of his first film at its privileged moments of secondary distancing. "Irony," according to Paul de Man, "engenders a temporal sequence of acts of consciousness which is endless."[2] *Report* begins in the ironical mode by seeming to be simultaneously about the assassination of John Kennedy and about the media's reportage of it. Like Conner's first two films, it proceeds, again gradually, toward irony by incorporating collage elements which reflect on the ambiguities of the initial situation.

Repetition, in the form of loop printing, is the dominant trope of the film until its final expansion. Over and over again we see the motorcade, the rifle carried through the police station, an ambulance, Jackie waving as the soundtrack records a news broadcast consecutively from the time of the shooting to the public announcement of death. The discontinuity between narrative and image is the first of the second-degree ironies in the film.

At unexpected points seemingly extraneous material coincides with phrases from the soundtrack. When the newsmen report that the "doors fly open" on Kennedy's car, Conner cuts to refrigerator doors opening by themselves from a commercial. Mention of the President's steak dinner

coincides with the death of a bull. In irony's hall of mirrors these are further reflections of the discontinuity which the progress of the film widens and never attempts to repair.

All three of Conner's films aspire to an apocalyptic vision by engendering in the viewer a state of extreme ambivalence. A *Movie* and *Cosmic Ray* achieve this by alternative gestures of attraction (humor, in the first, eroticism in the second) and repulsion (violence in both). The change of pace tactic is not necessary for *Report*. The film utilizes the emotional matrix of the Kennedy assassination evoked by the newsreel material and above all by the verbal report, while establishing an ever-widening distance from it by means of the looping, the lack of synchronization with the sound, the metaphors, and the linguistic coincidences. It is the one film of the three that does not reverse its tone; it simply reveals itself more and more clearly as what it was at first.

The fables of *The End* and the ironies of Conner's first three films share an apocalyptic despair which will diminish, but not die out, in their immediate successors. Both film-makers extended the technical discoveries of their early works in films that were less ambitious and prophetic but no less exquisite. But I shall pass by those works in this schematic chapter in order to clarify the outline of a tradition which has not been defined before. Ron Rice and Robert Nelson, who continued in this line in the sixties, have simplified and elongated MacLaine's form, the picaresque. Nelson, as if to give his film more cohesion than Rice's, incorporated strategic elements from Conner's work.

Ron Rice's *The Flower Thief* (1960) is the purest expression of the Beat sensibility in cinema. It portrays the absurd, anarchistic, often infantile adventures of an innocent hero (played by Taylor Mead) while indirectly providing a portrait of San Francisco at the beginning of the sixties. The film-maker began his film with a myth about his working methods: "In the old Hollywood days movie studios would keep a man on the set who, when all other sources of ideas failed (writers, directors), was called upon to 'cook up' something for filming. He was called The Wild Man. *The Flower Thief* has been put together in memory of all dead wild men who died unnoticed in the field of stunt."[3]

The finished film seems to preserve the spirit of its making. The uneven lighting, a result of using outdated raw stock, the paratactic montage, which suggests that there was a minimum of editing after the film was shot, and the casual soundtrack create this impression. Although the film has a distinct beginning and end, one feels that the middle could be expanded endlessly. The sequence of its episodes is arbitrary. Rice described the action of the film in a note for its New York premiere at Cinema 16 (the spelling and punctuation are Rice's):

> The central character Taylor Meade a poet moves through a sequence of events. He steals a flower he enters. The Bagle Shop, returns to his home, (an abandoned powerhouse), discovers a

> man hidden in the cellar with a childs teddy bear. He washes the teddy bear in the bathroom then discovers the room full of people, and is chased. He destroys a bullshitting radio. The Beatniks carry on with spontaneous antics, reinacting the crucifistion, and changing the graphic meaning to the flag plainting at Iwo Jima. Telephone, pits, beats in lockers making love; a woman climbing monkey bars to reach her lover.
>
> The poet is searching, but he never finds love. The ending of the film suggests he finds something, but we do not know for he disappears into the sea. The audience must discover the "message" if one is demanded. Elements of Franz Kafka and Russian Humanism are there.[4]

Occasionally the soundtrack veers from random accompaniment to crude poetry: "The time man has spent in his brothers' prisons can now be measured in light years"; "Christ on opium, marijuana used in the past. . . . Peruvian civilization based on cocaine, America on coca-cola." Or to irony (an excerpt from *Peter and the Wolf* is heard while Mead picks flowers, *Alexander Nevsky* while he moves among firetrucks and tries to direct traffic).

Ron Rice's films contain mythic elements, but his heroes are neither the somnambulistic dreamers of the trance film in search of sexual identity nor the Romantic questers of the mythic cinema. They are complex mediators who move between realism and allegory within a single film in a chain of discontinuous roles. At times the poet of *The Flower Thief* becomes the impersonal victim of society, as when he is tried in a cardboard court, upon which is written Justice, for urinating in the park. But Rice also has an eye for the poetic particulars of naturalism: the poet's feeding his cat in the powerhouse by candlelight and a brief scene of a couple taking a shower are high points in his film.

Rice would have made another episodic film right after *The Flower Thief*; he even attempted two, one called *The Dancing Master* and another with his close friend, the painter and film-maker Jerry Joffen. But he lost interest in them. According to a story he told in 1962, *Senseless*, finished that year, came out of a film he had planned to make of Eric Nord's island. Nord had been an actor in *The Flower Thief* and the proprietor of the Gaslight Cafe in Venice, California, who, as the story goes, purchased an island from the Mexican government with the modest intention of establishing a Utopia. Unfortunately he neglected to ascertain whether or not there was fresh water on his island. There was not, of course. So he and his pilgrims set up camp with army surplus parachutes for tents on the shores of Baja, California. When Rice and some other settlers arrived, Nord and his pioneers were gone. Unfurled lonely parachutes rocked with the breezes. Whether *The Dancing Master* was to be the Utopian film of Nord's island or whether Rice had planned to make an entirely different film on that terrestrial paradise, I do not know; nor does it matter much,

since the nucleus of his projected film was gone either way. He had filmed the trip down to the camp and the deserted parachutes and whatever of the Mexican landscape interested him along the way. He and his friends stayed in Mexico, filming one thing and another as tentative films occurred to them.

When Rice got to New York he pooled the various episodes and studies together. Since there would be no plot, nor even the continuity of a single mediator, he pretended the film had been written by Jonas Mekas, who at that time was devoting many of his columns in the *Village Voice* to promoting the plotless film. On the screen he gives Mekas credit for "the script." It is a natural irony of circumstances that the resulting film of Rice's potpourri, *Senseless*, is by far the most carefully organized, formal film he left. (He died of pneumonia while in Mexico at the end of 1964.) It is a film thematically constructed around a trip to and from Mexico, with recurrent images of cars and trains (they actually sold their car illegally and slipped out of the country on the train) and much pot-smoking. The rhythmic intercutting of scenes gives the film its cohesion.

Back in New York, his hometown, Rice brought together Taylor Mead and Winifred Bryan, a colossal black woman, to make *The Queen of Sheba Meets the Atom Man*. He did not live to complete the editing. He was constantly cutting it and adding new sequences. Bryan plays an alcoholic odalisque, and Mead much the same type as in the earlier film but now with overtones of a scientist. In the rough cut which Rice often screened to raise money to complete the film, there were two scenes of extended parody: a spoof on *Hamlet* with Jack Smith as the Prince, and a less direct take-off on Gregory Markopoulos' *Twice a Man*, which had been completed while *The Queen of Sheba Meets the Atom Man* was in production. In his tentative version Rice ended his film where Markopoulos' began, on the Staten Island ferry. According to Taylor Mead's notes on the production, the *Hamlet* spoof was to have been preceded by an excerpt from the Olivier film version, and another film quotation from Welles's *The Trial* was to have introduced still another satire.

The combination and intercutting of characters brought *The Queen of Sheba Meets the Atom Man* a step closer to the synthetic process of the mythic film, but at the same time the ironic gap between the actors as they appear on the screen and the roles they assume widened. In this enlarged space the film moves between epiphany and parody. The divorce between the subjective center of the film and the various forms it takes is reflected in Taylor Mead's encounter with many objects. Attracted to household products by advertisements, he does not understand their functions; so he will rub a box of cereal over his clothes or, with Chaplinesque inventiveness, insert the prongs of an electric plug in his nose in the hope of getting high. The subjectivity of the mythopoeic protagonist is grounded in his privileged contact with the primal rhythms and rituals of the universe, even when they defeat him. Rice concentrates on describing the estrangement of his heroes in terms of realities. Although he may suggest a deeper, al-

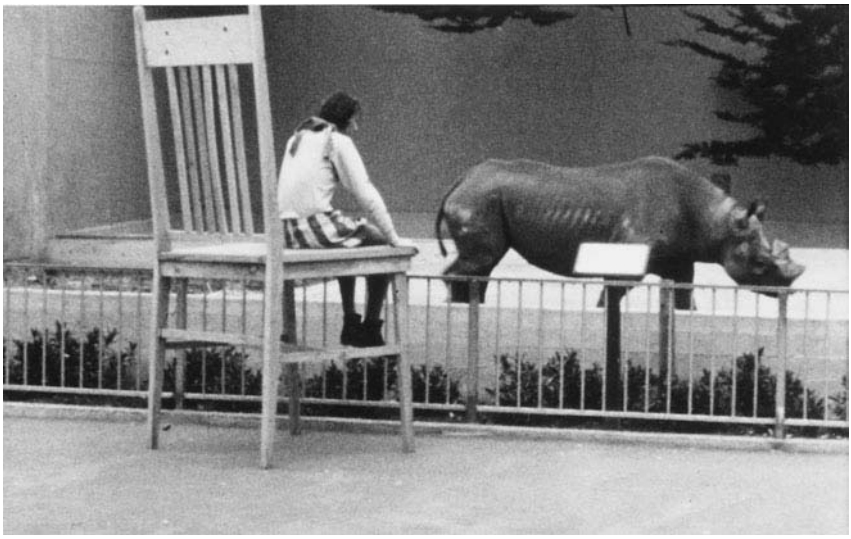
ternative core of existence for the protagonist of *The Flower Thief*, he is more reluctant to do so for the figures of his later picaresque. When relieved of the immediate estrangement of the city, they manifest their subjectivity ironically: they engage in parodies.

A late example of the type of film being discussed is Robert Nelson's *The Great Blondino* (1967). In it, the picaresque and the mythic overlap, and irony, which is prevalent in many aspects of the film, ceases to play a structural role. In the previous chapters we have seen the applicability of Harold Bloom's analysis of Romantic mythopoeia to several major films of the American avant-garde, whose "myth, quite simply, is myth: the process of its making, and the inevitability of its defeat." Here the same pattern can be seen with somewhat diminished intensity. Blondino, the central character, a tightrope walker, wanders through the San Francisco townscape pursued by a detective from "the committee." In his gray clown suit, the alienated and naïve protagonist is the immediate heir of the flower thief and of MacLaine's figures, and more distantly but even more closely a reincarnation of the caged artist in pursuit of his eye in Peterson's *The Cage*. This connection, of which Nelson and his collaborator, the painter William Wiley, were unaware, is never so apparent as when Blondino pushes his ever-present wheelbarrow through crowded streets wearing a blindfold.

One debt to earlier films has been acknowledged by Nelson repeatedly: since his second film, *Confessions of a Black Mother Succuba* (1965), he has recognized his debt to Bruce Conner. From the very opening of *The Great Blondino*, his sixth film, the synthesis of Conner and Rice is evident. A white knight from a television commercial is transformed by a magical wand, also from a commercial, into the protagonist of the film, "a misfit, out of step," in the ironical language of one of the film's minor characters.

Until its last minutes the film has no narrative order. Scenes, which are too brief and dispersed to be called episodes, change and recur in rhythmic waves according to the logic of dream association. Several explicit scenes of the hero sleeping and even more references to dreams in the form of sawing wood or a line of "z's" flashing across the image can be meant either to frame a central portion of the dream or to implicate the entire film in a dream vision. At times, Blondino lapses into the passivity of a somnambulist from the trance film tradition. Then he mediates, as the dreamer, the disorienting encounter with collaged newsreels that the film-maker, again developing upon Conner's work, has built into the film.

Nelson suppresses the ironic presence of the quotations from newsreels and old films by meticulously integrating them into the spatial logic of his photographed scenes. Unlike Conner's collages, these images are not allowed to burst into the viewer's consciousness as affirmations of the materiality of the film as film. They are part of a strategy of careful disorientation which includes radical changes of scale. For instance, by superimposition Blondino appears to dance in a frying pan, and later in one of the most memorable images in the film he climbs on a gigantic chair



Conflict of scale in Robert Nelson's *The Great Blondino*.

several times taller than a man, actually built for this effect, to watch a rhinoceros pacing in the distance. The effect of this latter disorientation is all the greater because the placement of the chair in the foreground of the shot makes it look optically rather than actually enlarged for a few seconds before Blondino enters the frame to provide a measure of camparison.

At the very end of the film there is a narrative attended by an ironical undercurrent reflexively attesting to the cinematic illusion. First the detective makes a statement of his function in the film: "When the committee heard about this fellow, we were quite sure that his operations were not in the national interest." Up to that point, his role had only been suggested by his costume, mimicry, and a musical motif underlining his periodic appearances. Following the detective's speech, Blondino attempts his fatal rope-walking. This is the climax of the film, but Nelson distances from it by cutting from the actor to his image on the tightrope, first projected on the screen of a movie theater, then on television. When he falls, subjective drama and the affirmation of material fuse: his descent is indicated by a fast montage of flashes, flares, and numbers from academy leader. Then, by metaphorical extension, his disaster is prolonged in a quotation from a science fiction film in which a giant octopus captures a man.

In the final ambiguous moment of the film, Blondino walks again on solid ground, pushing the wheelbarrow, in an image of prismatic distortion. This resurrection, like the quoted images preceding it, is nostalgic. In a note for the Experimental Film Competition of Knokke-le-Zoute at the end of 1967, the film-makers offered the following statement:

Robert Nelson's *Bleu Shut*: the name of a boat, the clock, over a loop-printed image of a barking dog.

> This is a long film that uses no specific narrative development. Its coherence depends upon deeper non-verbal sensibilities. The great Blondino is a figurative allusion to the tightrope walker Blondin, who gained international fame in the 19th Century by walking many times across Niagara Falls on a tightrope. The film speaks about the level of risk at which we live and of the foolishness and beauty of our lives at the edge, where we confront that risk.[5]

Rather than speak of risk, the film longs for one. Its version of the process and defeat of mythopoeia is bound up with a temporal predicament of which the film-maker hardly seems aware. In this very controlled and well-integrated film, what is out of control and cannot be integrated is its elegiac mood, which ultimately undermines its mythopoeia.

Nelson's most sustained achievement so far, *Bleu Shut* (1970), found for itself a new form which could contain and derive energy from the contradictory tendencies of his fourteen earlier films. *Bleu Shut* is a prime example of the participatory film, a form which emerged at the end of the 1960s out of extensions of the structural film. If we survey these forms diachronically, it would seem that the great unacknowledged aspiration of the American avant-garde cinema has been the mimesis of the human mind in a cinematic structure. Beginning with an attempt to translate dreams and other revelations of the personal unconscious in trance film, through the imitation of the act of seeing in the lyric film and the collective unconscious in the mythopoeic film, this cinema attempted to define con-

sciousness and the imagination. Its latest formal constructions have approached the form of meditation—the structural film—in order to evoke more directly states of consciousness and reflexes of the imagination in the viewer. The participatory films follow the direction established by the structural cinema in finding corollaries for the conscious mind.

In *Bleu Shut* Nelson proposed film-viewing as a testing experience. At the same time George Landow was making *Institutional Quality* from the same premise, while Hollis Frampton was presenting montage as a logical function and cinematic construction in general as a system of thought in his film *Zorns Lemma*. Each of these film-makers came to this point of formal evolution following clues in their own earlier works rather than from mutual interaction or from a common source of inspiration. For both Landow and Frampton that immediate past entailed an intense involvement with the structural film. Nelson's one structural film, *The Awful Backlash* (1967), a single shot for fourteen minutes of a hand untangling the snarled line of a fishing reel, does not represent a crucial moment in his evolution. For him the fixed camera was one of many contingent strategies explored in several short films made at the same time as *The Great Blondino*, which later would inform the synthesis of *Bleu Shut*.

In *The Great Blondino* the film-maker attempted to unite footage he collected from various sources with his own photography through a mythic narrative that could bridge both. In *Bleu Shut* he invented a form which would be capable of holding together many different kinds of film while maintaining their integrity as home movies, advertisements, quotations, etc. In Nelson's inflection of the participatory form, the very question of synthesizing the materials of the film is handed directly to the viewer. In the ironic structure he provides, all images share a relationship to one-minute subsections of the film. Screen time is affirmed in two ways. A small transparent clock appears in the upper right-hand corner of the screen, measuring the minutes and seconds throughout the film. That measurement is reinforced by a number which flashes briefly on the screen at the beginning of each new minute.

The film is ironically subtitled "(30 minutes)" and at the beginning a woman's voice tells us, "This film will be exactly thirty minutes long." But it is not. At the end of the half hour the cards indicating the minutes no longer appear, but the film continues for another four or five minutes, according to its own clock, as its maker, in negative, tests the sound system in preparation for a speech about the nature of cinema, which we never hear. The failure of the film to terminate at the exact instant predicted surprises us because all of the other promises heard at the beginning were precisely fulfilled. The woman's speech describes the future of the film:

> I'm now off-stage where Bob and Bill can't hear me. This is how its gonna be: This film is exactly thirty minutes long. The little clock in the upper right and corner tells the exact amount of

> time that has elapsed from the beginning and the amount of time left. . . .
> At 5 minutes, 35 seconds comes the Johnny Mars Band.
> At 11:15, weiners.
> At 21:05, pornography.
> At 23:30, a duet.
> Watch the clock.

What she does not tell us is that most of the film's time will be occupied by a guessing game. For an entire minute a color photograph of a boat will appear on the screen with six possible names printed over it. The first time the choices are: Bodo, Moki-Moki, Heaven Sabuv, Vegas Vamp, Big Boy, and Sea Dancer. Offscreen, we hear two men, Bob and Bill (the filmmaker and William Wiley), deliberating on which name they will pick. At the end of the minute they each make a choice; then the woman tells them the answer. This game is repeated eleven times at intervals of one minute. More often than not, both men guess wrong. Naturally the viewer of the film is drawn into the guessing game because of its duration, repetition, and the possibility of measuring his luck against that of the two guessers within the film.

In the minute-long intervals between the pictures of the boats, or in parts of those minutes, various collected and photographed images appear which invoke different problems in the perception of film. The naked filmmaker, crawling through a cubicle of mirrors, creates a confusion of the actual with the reflected body. The image of a steaming hot-dog proclaims itself as a loop only when the viewer begins to perceive the repetitious pattern of a barely perceptible puff of steam, and then without any indication of a transition, the looping ends, and a fork severs the hot dog. A more obvious loop of a dog barking takes on an ambiguous dimension by the irregular alternation between silence and synchronized sound. The appearance of the frame line and surface dirt points out the filmic objectivity of an old pornographic film incorporated within *Bleu Shut*. Another allusion to the conventions of cinema is a Hawaiian number out of an old musical.

Each of these inserts, which are for the most part found objects, functions independently. There is no interweaving of imagery nor narrative continuity. Each elongates and divides the parts of the guessing game like advertising interrupting a television quiz show, but, unlike advertisements, they do not have a distinctly negative relation to the game. They are of equal importance, simply its reverse face. In fact, some of the intentional energy of the game carries over to the inserts, as if the audience were being called on to solve perceptual puzzles, to interpret them, and above all to construct a unity out of their diversity. *Bleu Shut* reverses the thrust of *The Great Blondino*. By fracturing the possible unities between found objects and filmed scenes and suggesting a field of cinematic perception with-

out a center—or at best with a problematic center—it demythologizes its own ironies and at the very end almost throws the film-maker outside his own film (he does not fit within its "30 minutes"). *The Great Blondino*, on the other hand, had a mythic center where the ironies of the materials could mesh with the ironies of the narrative.

The movement between works which establish a tentative center and those which disperse or put into question their centers, observed in these two films by Nelson, characterizes all of the films I have grouped in this chapter. At times the desire for a central organization has been satisfied by a loose, picaresque development substituting for a mythic core, and just as often (but not in the case of *Bleu Shut*) the dispersed structure has been a metaphor for the apocalyptic intention of the film. Different dynamics and dimensions of irony in the films of MacLaine, Conner, Rice, and Nelson have intensified the formal alternations within individual films and within whole filmographies. These film-makers have been grouped here not to suggest that they form a school or exhibit a regional sensibility. Far from it. Bruce Conner and Ron Rice were very independent figures who began working in film in the late 1950s when the avant-garde cinema was at its least cohesive. They simply share in their works certain patterns of responding to the void. MacLaine was another isolated artist who came at the very end of a strong movement, whose major film pointed chaotically toward the forms of the later 1950s. Nelson's work, on the other hand, marks the end of that period. In his hand the picaresque and the centerless film becomes a deliberate strategy for making works which respond to the new cohesion of the national avant-garde cinema of the 1960s. An enclosed picture of the historical moment we have been considering calls for a discussion of the films of Larry Jordan, even though the ironic factor, a common denominator of those I have been discussing, plays a minimal role in both his films of photographed actuality and his animated collages. His materials, subjects, and forms coincide and envision a continuous world where strong or fragile moods are never ruptured. Yet despite these thematic differences, Jordan's isolation and his artistic responses to the situation of the 1950s draw him into consideration with the men I have been discussing.

Larry Jordan's formative period as a film-maker extends throughout the 1950s. He began to make films at approximately the same time as Stan Brakhage, with whom he went to high school in Denver. Jordan appears in Brakhage's *Destistfilm* (1953) and Brakhage in his *Trumpit* (1956), both psycho-dramas. Brakhage's approach to film-making and the energy with which he pursued it was unique in the 1950s. He moved between Colorado, New York, and San Francisco, often in pursuit of the vanished centers of late-1940s film-making. He continued making and extending the form of the trance film until he forged the lyric cinema described in chapter 6. He not only avoided the kind of crisis most of his colleagues faced at that, time, but he even managed to keep up a frail connection between the

dispersed and sometimes retired film-makers he sought out in his cross-continental movements.

Jordan failed where Brakhage succeeded in finding a convincing form within the trance film. He matured as an artist and found his authentic voice in film by gradually withdrawing from the role of the film-maker that the previous generation of avant-gardists had established as a norm. As he lost interest in reconstituting the community of film-makers and in the politics of distribution and promotion toward the late 1950s, the distinction between a finished film and a work-in-progress seems to have dissolved for him. In its place came a gradual involvement with the possibility of cinema to testify to the processes of its own making and with films designed to celebrate a particular occasion. When he tentatively re-emerged as a publicly exhibiting film-maker at the apogee of the revived interest in the avant-garde film around 1963, he had produced a substantial body of work, radically different from his early psycho-dramas, to which it is difficult to assign dates.

In those few years Jordan had become one of the few film-makers to develop confidence in the artistic validity of a less formal, more spontaneous cinema. Elsewhere in America, in similar isolation, a few other film-makers had come to the same position, as we shall see in the next chapter. Later, when Jordan briefly released the films he had been making without thought of public exhibition, he put them in groups, usually combining animations with actualities: for example, *3 Moving Fresco Films* contained *Enid's Idyll* and *Portrait of Sharon*, both animations, and *Hymn in Praise of the Sun*, a series of "cine-portraits." Among his films are animated collages, pixilated actualities, portraits, superimposition films, and a hand-painted film. Some were edited within the camera. He described an aspect of his working process in *Film Culture*:

> [Making *Pink Swine*] I got very carried away with object animation and combining layout animation and object animation. I was moving objects at all different rates; I was setting the camera; I wasn't hand-holding it; I was using it just like a musical instrument, like playing a saxophone, pushing the button on the camera and moving the objects in rhythm. All those films [in *Petite Suite*] were improvised; they're virtually as they came out of the camera. . . . I didn't want everything to move at one particular rhythm; it all depended on what the subject material was. But I wasn't planning it. I was just letting my mind go and see what could be done in 100 ft. [i.e., about three minutes of film]. I liked the 100 foot form. The film was done before you had time to change cameras; I don't remember whether it was one sitting or not, but it wouldn't have been more than two days. You can't do a dance, one dance, in two different days, and these films are essentially dances, you know.[6]

The oscillation between predetermined and spontaneous films set in motion a spiralling intensity in the investigation of the oneiric and metaphysical dimensions of Jordan's cinema. Curiously unlike MacLaine, Conner, Rice, and Nelson, that intensity paralleled a growing frailty, so that the extraordinary series of works which represent the first climax of Jordan's career, *Duo Concertantes* (1962–1964), *Hamfat Asar* (1965), *The Old House, Passing* (1966), *Gymnopedies* (1968), and *Our Lady of the Sphere* (1969)—all animations of Victorian engravings except *The Old House Passing*—occupies an exquisite space and time where reverie and dream meet, delicately poised between nostalgia and terror.

Duo Concertantes has two parts, *The Centennial Exposition* and *Patricia Gives Birth to a Dream by the Doorway*. Both *Patricia* and *Hamfat Asar*, the two most spectacular of his animations, operate against the backdrop of a fixed scene. In the former, it is a back view of a young lady framed in a doorway looking out upon woods and a lake; in the latter, Jordan uses an engraving of a seacoast with cliffs. Time and a change of culture have given a surrealistic and nostalgic aura to Victorian woodcuts, as Max Ernst and several collagists between him and Jordan have known for five decades. Where Ernst slammed together radically incongruent images from such found material and thereby released the terrors of monstrosities and the sensual depth of inconceivable landscapes, Jordan has chosen to refine their delicacy and to push his images almost to the point of evanescence—a limit represented in several collages by the reductive metaphor of a film within a collage-film flickering with pure imageless light.

The background picture of *Patricia* returns us to the moment when the American avant-garde film found its first image of interiority, that is, to the image of Maya Deren pressing her hands against the window in *Meshes of the Afternoon* to gaze inwardly upon a double of herself chasing the mirror-faced figure. The doorway in which Patricia stands is both the port of exchange and the barrier between the inner and outer worlds, as Maya Deren's window and before her Mallarmé's "Fenêtre" had been. Outside, tiny images descend from the top of the screen. First an elephant comes down and slowly sinks out of the bottom, but in his downward course he deposits an object which hovers on the horizon of the lake. The discontinuous power of that horizon line to hold objects from falling down the flat screen provides the film with a frail but finely conceived tension between two illusionary gravities, that of the actual theater in which we see the film where objects must fall from the top of the screen through the bottom, as if to land on the floor under our feet, and the represented gravity line, the horizon, within the engraving. The manifestation of objects and their movements within the film enumerate the variations possible between these two centers of gravity.

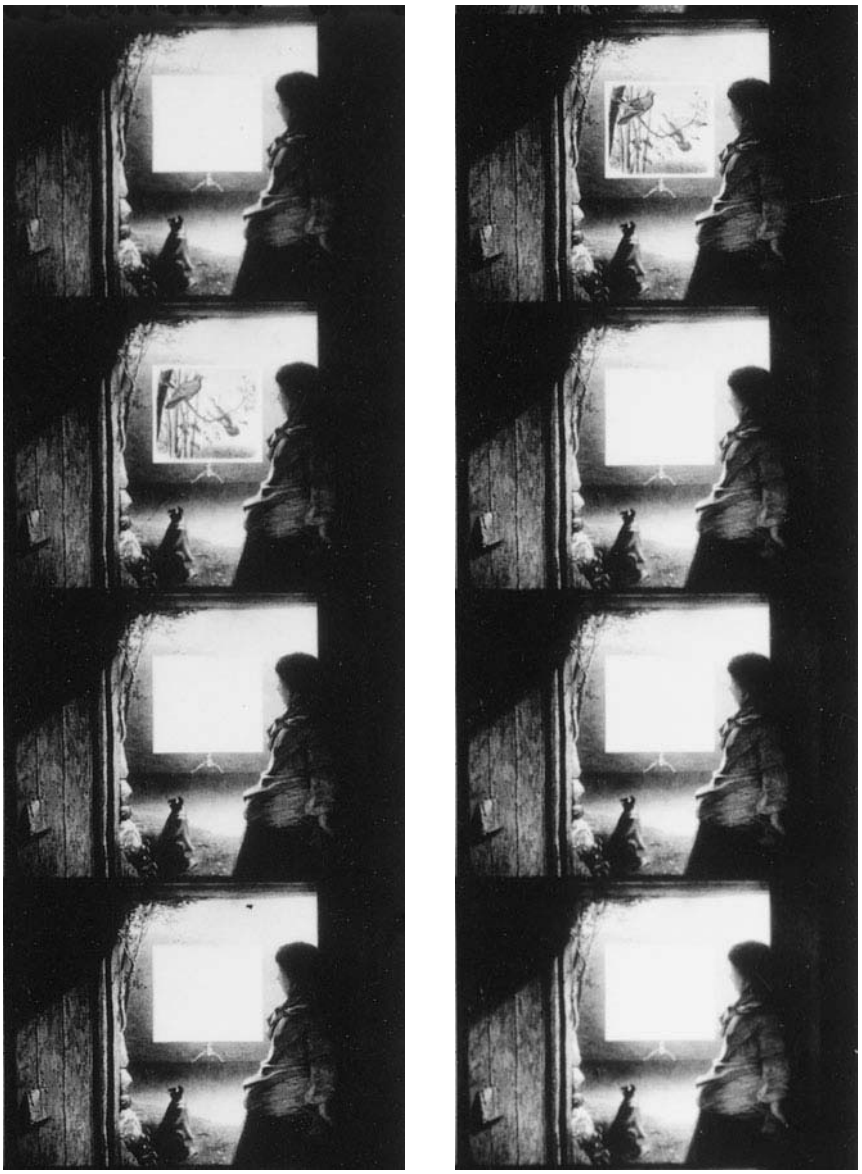
In the incessant materialization and disappearance offscreen or suddenly vanishing by moving of objects and creatures, the usual way of defeating the gravitational forces is by growing wings and flying offscreen,

at the edges. The inside/outside distinction and its evaporation generates the central apperceptive metaphor of the film. A picture stand appears on the horizon. On its white screen a black-and-white flicker occurs; slides appear in sequence; then a bird flaps its wings in an evocation of the origins of cinema. It flies off the screen and into the illusory landscape surrounding it. In the final extensions of this trope, a swarm of bees appears on the little screen; some disappear as soon as they overreach its frame, but others escape into the landscape. These bees come inward, past the unmoving woman, and are lost within the house. To commemorate this triumph of the imagination, a star falls splashing into the lake, an egg takes wing, and Larry Jordan's most delicate film ends.

In *Hamfat Asar* (whose title joins a made-up word from Jordan's household, "Hamfat," with an archaic name of Osiris, the Egyptian underworld god) the film-maker generates tensions similar to that of the discontinuous horizon in the earlier film by stretching a tightrope across his seascape. A figure on stilts crosses it repeatedly while creatures and objects float by in the background, manifest themselves, and obscure the foreground or cross and perch upon the tightrope. In the course of his crossings, he will become a bird, a train, a floating balloon.

Once, the entire picture bursts into actual flames. Later a star explodes, first whitening, then blackening out the whole image. When the landscape reappears, the tightrope is gone, but the man on stilts starts to cross, successfully, as if it were there. He does not complete the passage until, at the end of the film, a cloud floats by on which he can stand.

The Centennial Exposition, Gymnopedies, and *Our Lady of the Sphere* use with increasing complexity numerous backdrops which are connected by the continuous movement of a foreground figure from one to the next, although that figure tends to be undergoing its own continual metamorphosis. In *Gymnopedies* he tinted the entire film a pastel blue, and in *Our Lady of the Sphere* several solid screen colors and occasionally split-screen two-color moments have a structural function in the complex animation. He alternates zooming motions, accenting first movements on the left side of the image, then on the right, and he uses Cubist superimpositions of a single figure out of phase with itself to represent new perspectives of space and depth in animation. He also uses montage to parallel interior scenes with those taking place on a moonscape. At its most complex, in a scene of circus acrobats turning into flashing stars, he employs hand-held backdrops and three different colors in superimposition with counterpointed movements on the different levels. In the middle of the film he shows a horse staring at an easel which becomes a film within a film, flickering and breaking the limits of its frame as had happened in *Patricia*. The elaborate techniques of *Our Lady of the Sphere* permit Jordan to break through the conventions of continuity he had created and then thoroughly explored in his earlier collage films. Yet he had to sacrifice the crucial tension of the slow and delicately elaborated imagery to gain the complex dynamics of the later film.



The flickering film-within-a-film: Larry Jordan's *Patricia Gives Birth to a Dream by the Doorway*.

In *The Old House, Passing,* he resurrected a setting from the trance film, the mysterious house, to construct a radically elliptical narrative that attains a height of fragility comparable to the best of his animated films. According to the film-maker:

> It is a ghost-film wherein the central mood revolves around a plot, rather than moving straight along a plot line. Mood predominates over plot, but plot is always there before the eye, as well as behind and to the side of it. Within the meshes of the fabric an older woman has lost a man (husband?) and a child thru a mysterious accident or disappearance. Elements (a young man, woman and child) are drawn into her which release her from the past and the dark mysteries of the huge old house and the night-walking spirit of the departed soul.[7]

In this film Jordan translated the strategies of his animated films into events in actual space and time. By using prolepsis, repetition, and shifting perspective he keeps the relatively simple narrative in an elusive state of development throughout the film, as if he were extending the conventional opening of a mystery film into a total structure. The full disclosure of the narrative is suspended, hinted at, but never achieved. The situations of the film—a couple and their child spending a night in an old house and subsequently exploring it; the old woman who lives there watching them; the ghost of her dead husband watching her and them—give rise to an ambivalence in which the distinction between observation and fantasy breaks down, and past and present interpenetrate. The reveries of *Patricia Gives Birth to a Dream by the Doorway* have their narrative equivalents in the slow, formally composed, chiaroscuro images of shifting and overlapping explorations, discoveries, and encounters.

Rather than reach a climax, the film simply shifts to a scene of exorcism. The family visits a cemetery, where we assume the ghost is buried, and in an act of deflating the mood of mystery, they blow soap bubbles through the graveyard and leave. But even that release is framed by the perspective of the ghost who watches their departure.

The Old House, Passing makes the temporality which is at the heart of all the films discussed in this chapter thematic. These film-makers of the fifties and sixties were perhaps the first to explore the fundamental disparity between the nostalgia of the photographic image and the "nowness" of projected film. Once this chasm began to open for them, they created an apocalyptic and a picaresque form that commented ironically on that temporality. It also sought to bridge that chasm with an ontology of terror (MacLaine's desperate men, Conner's disasters, the flower thief's paranoia, Blondino's tightrope walk, and the haunting of *The Old House, Passing*) which reaches its most diminished point in the experience of harmless risk (the games of *Bleu Shut*). Risk and terror (and in Jordan's case the thres-

hold between terror and wonder) provide the healing moment in which cinematic time and the time of its perception would coincide.

In New York during the same years other film-makers were encountering the same temporal paradox, which they took as their theme in different personal ways, creating myths of recovered innocence and its failure.

eleven

Recovered Innocence

When ken jacobs[1] edited *Blonde Cobra* in 1963 out of footage his friend Bob Fleischner had abandoned and tapes Jack Smith had made, he had not seen, nor even heard of, Christopher MacLaine's *The End*, made exactly ten years earlier. Yet the two films are remarkably similar. They are both exaggerated expressions of suicidal despair whose formal structure metaphorically reflects their themes of self-destruction and disintegration. Although MacLaine combines the stories of several lonely people in his film and Jacobs presents only one—that of Jack Smith, himself a film-maker—two structural similarities outweigh this difference. Long passages of spoken narration while the screen is black appear periodically, and black-and-white is regularly interwoven with color imagery. In both films these devices are used aggressively to rupture continuity and challenge the consciousness of the viewer. Even the distinction between the multiple perspective of *The End* and the single character of *Blonde Cobra* begins to break down. In the latter film Jack Smith assumes different

roles (the lonely little boy, Madame Nescience, Sister Dexterity) and tells their stories, while in the earlier film the stories merge in the final montage.

Although the relationship between these two films is not genetic, they bracket an era of the American avant-garde contemporary with the Beat sensibility. They also bracket the country. Just as *The End* depends upon the cityscape of San Francisco, *Blonde Cobra*, even though it is shot almost entirely indoors, makes the presence of New York felt. Early in the film, as Smith nibbles on a clump of tile and cement in a sordid room, we hear a radio broadcast: "Twelve noon by the century-old chimes in historic City Hall. This is New York, the city of opportunity, where eight million people live in peace and harmony and enjoy the benefits of democracy." Near the end, Smith quotes himself: " 'Why shave? . . . when I can't even think of a reason for living?' Jack Smith. 1958. Sixth Street."

Jacobs insists upon the idea of a film as a dying organism throughout his works. *Blonde Cobra* breaks down before it can get started. After the first few tentative images, we hear Ginger Rogers sing one line, "Let's call the whole thing off," followed by a mess of scribbles on leader and a halting of the soundtrack. After two blasts of live radios in the theater and a change to color imagery and back to black-and-white, the character on screen says, "We will now start all over again." We see him writing out the film's titles.

The two false starts and the shock of the radios are the first challenges to the concentration of the viewer. The presence of the radios is incorporated within the film when the announcement, "Twelve noon," booms out on the soundtrack and again later when a single live radio plays, synchronized with a scene of Smith in baby clothes playing peek-a-boo and apparently listening to a radio. When the actor on screen smashes his radio's tubes with a hammer, the sound in the audience stops abruptly. It is only at this late point that the audience receives a sign that the interaction of picture and live radio is not arbitrary.

Even more unsettling is the duration of the black passages. At the beginning of the first story—the lonely little boy who waits all day for his mother to bring him candy ("She would give him some, but not much, just a little because she would save most of it for herself")—there are flashes of Smith miming the tale, promising the viewer a visualization which never materializes. That same promise is renewed when, after several long minutes, that story ends and we see Smith in drag as Madame Nescience. But he is on the screen less than a minute before blackness descends again, and the whole of her dream is told without illustration. By this time Jacobs has engendered a strong frustration of visual expectations. Another even briefer image appears, only to be followed by a repetitive, contradictory song ("God is not dead, he is just marvelously sick . . . God is dead . . .") through another long blackness. After these three central voids, Jacobs no longer uses this tactic, but the viewer who sees the film for the first time watches to the end under the threat of them. In fact, Jacobs momentarily teases us with the possibility of more. The

screen briefly blackens and Smith quotes, " 'Life swarms with innocent monsters.' Charles Baudelaire." But this time the image returns immediately.

The narratives themselves are networks of ironies. The film-maker uses repetition to intensify the duration of the black passages. After a long description of the lonely little boy's day, Smith makes us fear an endless prolongation of the story by saying, "Next day, same thing all over again. Mother . . . Mother . . . Mother." But rather than retell the empty events he introduces a new trope by changing from the third to the first person and closes the ironic distance between his story and himself:

> Then, and there was a little boy that lived upstairs . . . and one day the little boy found the other little boy that lived upstairs, the family who lived upstairs, in the upstairs floor, and the little boy who was less than seven, the lonely little boy, the lonely little boy was less than seven, I know that because we didn't leave Columbus until I was seven, I know it, I was under seven and I took a match and I lit it and I pulled out the other little boy's penis and I burnt his penis with a match!

At the moment of transition to the first person, the narrative tone changes to a rapid, hysterical confession which mounts in intensity until the last word, which ends both the story and the blackness.

A comparable shift of narrative levels occurs in the subsequent story. First he establishes the character of Madame Nescience, then he describes her sadistic dream in which she becomes a Mother Superior. He repeatedly confuses the roles while relating the dream. At one point, while imitating the voice of Sister Dexterity, he addresses the Mother Superior as if she were the dreamer: "Madame Nescience—I mean, Mother Superior!" and excuses his lapse by saying "you see this is a dream." But after that he continues to call the nun by the dreamer's name without correcting himself.

The space through which the characters move is cluttered and cramped. The camera hovers close to them, often shifting slightly to follow their movements. Even when they dance to the Astaire and Rogers' duet, "Let's call the whole thing off," the camera cannot get a shot of their whole bodies. It must pan down to their feet. Generally the footage looks like what it is, fragments of two abandoned films, with little concern for composition within the frame or spatial elaboration. Yet within the ironic structure Jacobs made for this material, its fragmentation and lack of composition become positive qualities.

In the fifth catalogue of the Film-Makers Cooperative, Jacobs describes the genesis and the theme of the film:

> Jack [Smith] says I made the film too heavy. It was his and Bob's [Fleischner] intention to create light monster-movie comedy. Two comedies, actually two separate stories that were being

> shot simultaneously until they had a falling out over who should pay for the raw stock destroyed by a fire when Jack's cat knocked over a candle. Jack claimed it was an act of God. In the winter of '59 blue Bob showed me the footage. Having no idea of the original story plans I was able to view the material not as exquisite fragments of a failure, of two failures, but as the makings of a new entirety. Bob gave over the footage to me and with it the freedom to develop it as I saw fit.
>
> Silly, self-pitying, guilt-strictured and yet triumphing—on one level—over the situation with style, because he's unapologetically gifted, has a genius for courage, knows that a state of indignity can serve to show his character in sharpest relief. He carries on, states his presence for what it is. Does all he can to draw out our condemnation, testing our love of limits, enticing us into an absurd moral posture the better to dismiss us with a regal "screw off."[2]

What is the precise nature of the triumph of which Jacobs speaks? Surely it is not the qualified optimistic moment of the apocalyptic and picaresque films discussed in the previous chapter: the moment of forgetting doom just before the end of *The End*, the final mystery of *A Movie*, the scattered ecstasies of *The Flower Thief*, Blondino's resurrection, or the exorcism that concludes *The Old House, Passing*. There is a moment in *Blonde Cobra* when Jerry Sims collapses in a dance and Smith continues the number by himself that hints at release. In the scene immediately following, the penultimate of the film, there is the structural possibility of such a vision, but it is deliberately made ironic. Smith in baby clothes plays peek-a-boo with the camera to the accompaniment of a live radio in the audience. The potential energy for making this scene a triumph—a willful deepening of Smith's infantilism—begins when he smashes the radio on screen, at which point the radio in the audience stops, as already noted. Baby music from a child's record comes on. He seems to have defied the radio's interruption of his fantasy. But then he undermines this moment by smoking a cigarette and burning holes with its tip in the piece of gauze between the camera and himself. This act, which had occurred before in the film, characterizes the scene as another sordid episode in this mock quest for sexual identity.

Jacobs hated the trance film when he began to make cinema. At the time, he has said, it seemed "precious" and "narcissistic" to him. Although he eschewed its form and conventions, he borrowed its central theme in *Blonde Cobra*. The individual scenes and stories provide an ironic series of sexual options. Transvestism also pervades the film; most of the time he is on the screen, Smith wears drag. The one sustained episode in color has a masochistic climax: Sims, imitating a thirties gangster, enters the room where Smith and another man are puffing smoke at each other and

burning a necktie with their cigarettes. Sims stabs one man to death and then attacks Smith with his knife. He cringes and grimaces in fear. Then he mumbles, "Sex is a pain in the ass," and the camera pans up Smith's body to show the knife inserted in his buttocks.

The last station of this sexual odyssey is the very infantilism which had inflected the manner in which all the other sexual options were portrayed. But within *Blonde Cobra* this is not a resolution of the sexual problematic. In the final scene, Smith chants in desperation, "A mother's wisdom had dragged me down to this! a crummy loft! a life of futility! hunger! despair!" He puts a toy gun to his head. The image of a graveyard, first seen when the radio announcer described New York in the first part of the film, appears. Then Smith collapses to the floor revealing Sims behind him holding a card reading FIN. As the film runs out, we hear Smith crying "What went wrong? What went wrong? What went wrong?" referring both to the failed suicide and the end of the film.

The triumph to which Jacobs alludes is not within the film. It is the triumph of the ironical mode which brackets dreams within stories, confuses a character with the actor portraying it, and reveals a sexual despair while mocking sexual despairs. The folding over of guises and revelations deprives the film of a fixed point of reference, the solid presence of content, and makes it into a film object, which fitfully starts and after almost expiring several times, dies with an unanswered question, "What went wrong?"

The style and the form of *Blonde Cobra* were developed over a number of years. Throughout the late 1950s Jacobs had been shooting and editing a vastly ambitious film, *Star Spangled to Death*, which runs approximately three hours. In conceiving and making the film Jacobs developed his aesthetic of failure. In an unpublished interview, Jacobs described his ambitions for this film and its structure:

> I had a terrific bent toward a barren dynamic perfection. I was leaning in every possible way toward a work like Mondrian would make. At the same time, these perfect structures, I knew, were not right. I felt that their destruction revealed more of a truth than their standing perfection. [For *Star Spangled to Death* I was] days ahead of time setting up very involved sets and situations for Jack and Jerry to wander into, situations which they could break up.
>
> I would just move toward some ordered situation and then introduce Jack or Jerry to break up its pattern or to create some new possibilities of patterns that my mind would not have come up with. I felt the chaos of those two individuals and my penchant for a pattern clarified each other; the patterns became clearer because of the chaos, in the midst of the chaos; these two bodies of chaos became clearer because of the pattern.

> I was very interested in combustion. There was even a long destruction sequence in which thing after thing was broken . . . Just watching things break, and in their breaking reveal their structure, had the most vibrant moment of life, all the clarity of their being made, like explicitly for their moment of destruction. I was interested in revealing things in their breaking and I wanted *Star Spangled to Death* to be a film that was constantly breaking.[3]

In talking about his film Jacobs is careful to distinguish between the "collapse of order" he wanted to achieve and "pure disorder." The relationship between order and its collapse recalls Stan Brakhage's use of chance operations within a controlled editing situation. Jacobs seems to have translated this interplay to the shooting stage by allowing the unpredictable character of his two chief actors to transform the structure of his fixed and very intricate compositions. Both formulations of this aesthetic have their roots in Abstract Expressionism. Jacobs's comes directly from it without the mediation of contemporary American poetics; he studied painting with Hans Hofmann at the Art Students League and in Provincetown in the late 1950s before devoting his energies completely to cinema. In the same interview, he compares the sudden shifts of meaning he wanted to have in *Star Spangled to Death* to Abstract Expressionist painting:

> All your preconceptions of Jack or Jerry could be just turned around any moment. You'd have to rethink who they were again. I was interested in painting that could constantly make you reconceive the entire work. You'd think it was *this* kind of painting, or this kind of spatial development; and then you hit a point in the painting when you realize that this thing was not behind that.[4]

In a much later structural film, *Soft Rain* (1968), Jacobs would bring this painterly adventure of perception to cinema. In his notes for the fifth Film-Makers' Cooperative catalogue he is the film's best analyst:

> Three identical prints of a single 100 ft. fixed-camera take are shown from beginning to end-roll light-flare, with a few feet of blackness preceding/bridging/following the rolls. View from above is of a partially snow-covered low flat rooftop receding between the brick walls of two much taller downtown N.Y. loft buildings. A slightly tilted rectangular shape left of the center of the composition is the section of rain-wet Reade Street visible to us over the low rooftop. Distant trucks, cars persons carrying packages, umbrellas sluggishly pass across this little stagelike area. A fine rain-mist is confused, visually, with the color emulsion grain.

> A large black rectangle following up and filling to space above the stage-area is seen as both an unlikely abyss extending in deep space behind the stage or more properly, as a two dimensional plane suspended far forward of the entire snow/rain scene. Though it clearly if slightly overlaps the two receding loft building walls the mind, while knowing better, insists on presuming it to be overlapped by them. (At one point the black plane even trembles.) So this mental tugging takes place throughout. The contradiction of 2D reality versus 3D implication is amusingly and mysteriously explicit.[5]

In this superbly detailed description of the phenomenological reading of his own film, Jacobs omits saying that the black rectangle registers as a shade between the camera and the view described as soon as it trembles. In turn this gives rise to the unresolved possibility that we may be looking through a window. He continues:

> Filmed at 24 f.p.s. but projected at 16 the street activity is perceptibly slowed down. It's become a somewhat heavy laboring. The loop repetition (the series hopefully will intrigue you to further run-throughs) automatically imparts a steadily growing rhythmic sense of the street-activities. Anticipation for familiar movement-complexes builds, and as all smaller complexities join up in our knowledge of the whole the purely accidental counterpassings of people and vehicles becomes satisfyingly cogent, seems rhythmically structured and of a piece. Becomes choreography.[6]

There he ends. Although the loops are identical, the image leaves us unsure of that until we can identify and match one of the movements. Once the looping is confirmed, we wonder how many times we will see it. Unnoted by the film-maker is the interesting relationship between the purely linear graphic grid of the composition (the wall of one building forming a perfect diagonal to the center of the screen, the black rectangle coming exactly halfway down from the top) and the eccentric juxtaposition of these elements as volumes. Jacobs's formal description of *Soft Rain* is evidence of the "bent for barren dynamic perfection" he spoke of in relation to *Star Spangled to Death*.

The making of *Star Spangled to Death* took most of Jacobs's artistic energies between 1957 and 1963. It is a work of such scope and ambition that despite its negativity and its aesthetic of failure it participates in the myth of the absolute film. He once described a screening of a Ron Rice film at the Film-Makers' Cinemateque at which a reel of film fell from a table near the projector and rolled across the balcony floor, through a partition in the rail, and down to the seats below without harming anyone. He would have liked to have such an ending for the projection of *Star*

Spangled to Death. He is aware too that his long inability to complete the film was bound up with its aesthetic.

In addition to *Blonde Cobra*, Jacobs completed *Little Stabs at Happiness* (1959–1963) as a by-product of, or "a true breather" from, his long film. Except for the addition of titles which identify the four sections of the film and the use of 78-rpm records and a short monologue on the soundtrack, the film is exactly as it came out of the camera, with no editing. Both Smith and Sims appear in it. The first episode shows Smith and a woman sitting in a dry bathtub playing with dolls. At one point he tries to eat the crotch of a doll between puffs on a cigarette. The camera moves casually, often resting on a bare lightbulb or another static element in the room.

Each part of the film (they are all in color) is a separate moment without narrative causality. Each is immediately present. But as if he were unable to bear the unqualified presence of his images, in the second section Jacobs himself intrudes on the soundtrack, apologizing for his monologue by saying that he wanted some sound other than music to relax the audience's restlessness at this point. He then launches, in the most casual manner, a full-scale attack on the presence of his film. First he undermines the temporal integrity of the visual episode; then he attempts to involve us in the lives of the people we see on the screen. He tells us what time it is, 12:28, the moment of his recording the soundtrack. He brings the clock nearer to the microphone so we can listen to it tick. He plays a few notes on an organ before telling us he wants to use it in a future film. He even inserts a lacuna in the soundtrack itself: "I've just played that back," he says, "and I like it. It's vague." Meanwhile, on the screen two women have been sitting on chairs on a roof. The camera pans slowly from the shoes of one to those of another. A series of leisurely, careful compositions shows them rocking before a brick wall. After the lacuna, Jacobs tells us that he no longer sees anyone in the film. He begins by describing how the two women have disappeared from his life and goes on to describe his broken relationships with Jerry Sims and Jack Smith. The nostalgia of this monologue transforms our perception of the songs in the later sections. As dated pieces, they now carry a sense of pastness which spreads over to the images as well. But unlike *Blonde Cobra* and *Star Spangled to Death*, the immediacy of the visual is much stronger than the verbal undermining.

In the next section, "It Began to Drizzle," Jacobs presents fixed-frame compositions of Jerry Sims and a woman sitting outside in a light rain. A table and chairs have been set up on cobblestones. The shots shift in a geometrical elaboration of the space between the two unspeaking actors. Often one occupies the extreme foreground while the other sits in the distance. At the end of this sequence, there is a brief silent scene of Jacobs himself drawing chalk figures on a sidewalk among Chinese children.

Jack Smith, as "the Spirit of Listlessness" dressed in a clown suit, plays and lounges on a roof. He sucks at colored balloons, flashes light into the

camera with a mirror, and almost seems about to take flight to the song, "Happy Bird."

Smith himself made his own first film, *Scotch Tape* (1962), during the shooting of *Star Spangled to Death*. That day Jacobs had assembled his cast in a destroyed building or a section of a junkyard. Rusted cables in great tangles and broken slabs of concrete were all about. Smith borrowed the camera and filmed a dance of people exuberantly hopping around and under the cables. The area of wreckage was so extensive that he could film his dancers either from a few feet away or from hundreds of feet above them. Only by the size of the human figure is the scale of the shot perceptible. Occasionally panning but usually with a fixed frame, he mixed shots of nearness with extreme distances. In the longest shots he framed his group of actors in a corner of the cluttered image; then he positioned them under a covering slab of concrete so that in the brief duration of the shot the viewer must seek out the dancers in the visual field. In the closer shots he makes use of a green artificial flower under which they dance or which some of them hold in their teeth while jumping about. Once, the flower rests statically in focus while the blurred bodies vibrate in the background.

Scotch Tape is only three minutes long, in color, and appears to have been constructed in the camera without much subsequent editing, if any. It takes its title from a triangular wedge of dirty Scotch tape along the right side of the image. Since Jacobs seldom had enough money to develop his rushes from *Star Spangled to Death*, he had shot several rolls of film before he realized that the tape had gotten caught in the camera. Rather than let this accident ruin his film, Smith capitalized upon it in his title. Fortunately its fixed position offers a formal counterbalance to the play of scales upon which the shot changes are based.

Jonas Mekas hailed *Blonde Cobra, Little Stabs at Happiness*, and *Scotch Tape* as opening a vital new direction in the American cinema. On May 2, 1963, he wrote in his column "Movie Journal," in the *Village Voice*:

> Lately, several movies have appeared from the underground which, I think, are making a very important turn in the independent cinema. As *Shadows* and *Pull My Daisy* marked the end of the avant-garde experimental cinema tradition of the 40's and 50's (the symbolist-surrealist cinema of intellectual meanings), now there are works appearing which are marking a turn in the so-called New American Cinema—a turn from the New York realist school (the cinema of "surface" meanings and social engagement) toward a cinema of disengagement and new freedom.
>
> The movies I have in mind are Ron Rice's *The Queen of Sheba Meets the Atom Man*; Jack Smith's *The Flaming Creatures* [*sic*]; Ken Jacobs' *Little Stabs at Happiness*; Bob Fleischner's [*sic*] *Blonde Cobra*—four works that make up the real

> revolution in cinema today. These movies are illuminating and opening up sensibilities and experiences never before recorded in the American arts; a content which Baudelaire, the Marquis de Sade, and Rimbaud gave to world literature a century ago and which Burroughs gave to American literature three years ago. It is a world of flowers of evil, of illuminations, of torn and tortured flesh; a poetry which is at once beautiful and terrible, good and evil, delicate and dirty.
>
> *Blonde Cobra*, undoubtedly, is the masterpiece of the Baudelairean cinema, and it is a work hardly surpassable in perversity, in richness, in beauty, in sadness, in tragedy. I think it is one of the great works of personal cinema, so personal that it is ridiculous to talk about "author's" cinema. I know that the larger public will misinterpret and misunderstand these films.[7]

No artist within the American avant-garde film has equaled the influence of Jonas Mekas as a polemicist.[8] That influence was at its height in 1963 when he proclaimed the birth of the "Baudelairean cinema." He couched his evaluation in terms of a historical perspective quite different from that of this book. I would like to interrupt my discussion of Jacobs and Smith at this point to analyze and trace the history of Mekas's position.

In January 1955, Mekas published the first issue of his magazine, *Film Culture*. He had arrived in New York six years before as a displaced person along with his brother Adolfas. They both immediately began to learn the techniques of film-making, and Jonas continued to write poetry in his native Lithuanian. In that first issue they included an article by Hans Richter, their teacher at the Film Institute of City College of New York. "The Film as an Original Art Form" affirmed an essentially avant-garde stance. Nevertheless, the editorial position of the magazine represented in that first issue by Edouard de Laurot's "Toward a Theory of Dynamic Realism" was severely critical of the American avant-garde cinema. In the third issue, Mekas published "The Experimental Film in America," an attack in the guise of a survey with subsections entitled "The Adolescent Character of the American Film Poem," "The Conspiracy of Homosexuality," "The Lack of Creative Inspiration: Technical Crudity and Thematic Narrowness." He concluded, "The image of the contemporary American film poem and cineplastics, as briefly presented here, is decidedly unencouraging. . . . To improve the quality of the American film poem, experiments should be directed not so much towards new techniques but toward deeper themes, toward a more penetrating treatment of the nature and drama of the man of our epoch." Significantly, he calls for more attention to these film-makers as a way encouraging their improvement. Stan Brakhage has described an emergency meeting of the film-makers called by Maya Deren and Willard Maas at the time of the publication of this article to discuss the possibility of a lawsuit. Nothing came of it. Two and a half years later

(November 1957), Mekas turned over half the magazine to "The 'Experimental' Scene," in which film-makers themselves contributed articles. There were no more attacks.

With its nineteenth issue in 1959, *Film Culture* established the Independent Film Award to mark "the entrance of a new generation of film-makers in America." In the editorial for that issue, Mekas proclaimed the death of Hollywood. While describing the avant-garde cinema of the 1950s as a "degeneration," he gave those film-makers credit for having "kept the spirit of free cinema alive in America." The first flowering of that spirit was, according to him, the recipient of the first Independent Film Award—John Cassavetes's *Shadows*. In the next three issues, spread over two years, awards were given to Robert Frank and Alfred Leslie's *Pull My Daisy* and Richard Leacock's *Primary*. And, as the editorials became longer, more credit was given to avant-garde film-makers. Furthermore, since 1958 a feature article on a major avant-gardist by Parker Tyler had been part of every issue.

In the editorials between 1959 and 1961, one can see the tremendous impression *nouvelle vague* in France had on Mekas's thinking. It seemed to him that there had been a fundamental revolution in film-making, which he optimistically saw spreading to England and Poland as well as America. At the same time he was discovering an indigenous realist cinema in the work of Jerome Hill, Lionel Rogosin, and Morris Engel. With feature films in production by Shirley Clarke, Robert Frank, and numerous lesser-known independent directors who have not subsequently developed, it looked to Mekas as if the economics of American film-making had shifted from lavish Hollywood productions to more modest 35mm and even 16mm films. He interpreted this as the end of the "experimental" film of the 1940s and 1950s and the beginning of a more socially committed, more publicly oriented, independent cinema. Once he began thinking of the early avant-garde cinema as the forerunner of the movement of which he was the champion, he gradually began to see more in the films he had previously rejected.

In retrospect this is not at all surprising. Mekas's sensibilities are those of a Romantic. In three of his films he portrays himself reading books; in *Guns of the Trees*, it is Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* that opens and closes the film; throughout *Rabbitshit Haikus* (1962–1963), which he made while on the set of his brother's *Hallelujah the Hills*, he is reading Blake; in *Diaries, Notes, and Sketches*, subtitled *Walden*, it is Thoreau. The Romantic phenomenology was difficult to perceive in the avant-garde cinema of the 1940s and 1950s, but easier when the mythopoeic cinema in the early 1960s manifested itself. Jonas Mekas was there to recognize it and celebrate it. In 1958, he had been named the film critic of the *Village Voice*. By the early 1960s the paper had grown from local to national circulation with particular influence in the arts. Thus by the time he became the champion of the New American Cinema, Mekas was one of the most powerful film critics in America. The first clear sign of a shift in his

attitude toward the older avant-gardists was his choice of Maya Deren as his substitute critic at the *Village Voice* in the summer of 1960 when he took time off to concentrate on the shooting of *Guns of the Trees*.

Had he confined his activities to writing and making films, Jonas Mekas might not have been quite as powerful as he was to become in the early 1960s. On September 28, 1960, he called the first meeting of the New American Cinema Group, twenty-three independent film-makers of whom only one, Gregory Markopoulos, aside from Mekas himself, falls within the scope of this book. Of the several points outlined in their manifesto, one was to have revolutionary significance but not as envisioned by that group. The sixth point of the manifesto called for the foundation of "our own cooperative distribution center."

For a year Emile de Antonio tried to distribute a handful of 35mm short and feature films theatrically before a true film-makers' cooperative could be founded. During this unsuccessful effort, Mekas accepted the position of organizer of a series of special screenings, most of them on weekend midnights, at the Charles Theater on New York's Lower East Side. There he initiated a number of one-man shows for avant-garde film-makers whose work had never been completely shown in New York. He followed this up with an article on the film-makers in the *Voice*. He also began the tradition of open-house screenings to which film-makers brought unknown works, rushes, and works-in-progress. It was at such an open-house that he discovered Ken Jacobs, who was screening parts of *Little Stabs at Happiness*.

In the fall of 1961 Maya Deren died. Stan Brakhage happened to be in New York at the time, holding a series of screenings of his recent films at the Provincetown Playhouse. Since *Reflections on Black* (1955), Cinema 16, the only distributor of avant-garde films in the 1950s, had refused to handle his work or even to show it in their yearly programs devoted to the "experimental" film. When Mekas saw the ensemble of work Brakhage had produced between 1958 and 1961, he was sensitive to its quality. He awarded Brakhage the fourth Independent Film Award (*Film Culture* 24) for *The Dead* and *Prelude: Dog Star Man*. Since then the award has gone exclusively to avant-gardists: Jack Smith, Andy Warhol, Harry Smith, Gregory Markopoulos, Michael Snow, Kenneth Anger, Robert Breer, and James Broughton.

In 1962 Mekas himself took over the film distribution project. By this time the initial experiment at the Charles Theater had grown into a series of screenings, at first weekly and later daily, in various rented theaters around Manhattan. By 1962 the group of film-makers who had anticipated a radical change in the production and distribution of feature films in America had given up that idea. Yet Mekas realized that an outlet was needed for the films of Brakhage, Markopoulos, Menken, Jacobs, Smith, etc. He appointed the young film-maker David Brooks as manager of the cooperative. Its first catalogue contained only *Guns of the Trees, Pull My Daisy*, and the films of Gregory Markopoulos out of the list originally

proposed by the group. Cassavetes's *Shadows*, Clarke's *The Connection*, and even Adolfas Mekas' *Hallelujah the Hills* were being distributed commercially.

It would be several years before the rental fees of the Film-Makers' Cooperative and the income from the Film-Makers' Showcase, later called the Film-Makers' Cinematheque, would produce income of even a thousand dollars a year for the film-makers. Yet they provided a center where film-makers could see each other's work; and *Film Culture* and the *Village Voice* brought news of this activity around the country. On the model of the Film-Makers' Showcase, Bruce Baillie founded Canyon Cinema outside San Francisco in 1962 and soon after that moved it to Berkeley. By 1963 there was a Canyon Cinema Cooperative.

In "Notes on the New American Cinema" (*Film Culture* 24 1962), Mekas attempted a comprehensive synthesis of the realist and visionary tendencies within the independent cinema. He speaks of Morris Engel, Lionel Rogosin, John Cassavetes, Shirley Clarke, Sidney Meyers, Rickey Leacock, as well as Stan Brakhage, Robert Breer, Ron Rice, Marie Menken, Stan Vanderbeek, and several others, but in the polemical sections of the essay, "Part Two: A Few Statements on the New American Artist as a Man" and "Part Three: Summing Up, Connecting the Style with Man," he employs the language of Romantic and Abstract Expressionist aesthetics (the essay opens with quotations from De Kooning and Shelley):

> The new artist, by directing his ear inward, is beginning to catch bits of man's true vision. By simply being *new* (which means, by listening deeper than their other contemporaries), Brakhage and Breer contribute to the liberation of man's spirit from the dead matter of culture: they open new vistas for life. In this sense, an old art is immoral—it keeps man's spirit in bondage to Culture. The very destructiveness of the modern artist, his anarchy, as in Happenings, or, even, action painting, is, therefore, a confirmation of life and freedom.[9]

In the notes on "Improvisation," "The Shaky Camera," and "Acting," he makes it clear that he is less interested in the realistic world view of Engel, Clarke, Rogosin, and Leacock than in the way they substitute a kind of spontaneous performance for classical acting.

Mekas's involvement with a theory of acting extends back almost as far as his involvement with Romantic poetry. Before they left Lithuania, he and Adolfas had set up a regional theater. Later in a German camp for displaced persons they studied with Ippolitas Tvirbotas, a teacher of the Stanislavsky method. But it was the transformation of acting into performance, or the breakdown of the difference between the performer and his role, that seems to have particularly interested him in the later 1950s and early 1960s. The first four Independent Film Awards, for instance, show a progressive preference for the reality of performance. In *Shadows*, actors

play in a spontaneous and improvising manner; in *Pull My Daisy*, non-actors—poets and a painter—play themselves, in *Primary* the performers are Senators Kennedy and Humphrey, playing for the presidency as filmed with Leacock's passionate detachment. Finally, in the Brakhage films, the film-maker makes himself, his family, indeed his life, the subject of his film; it is passionate self-involvement.

Although this sensitivity to a philosophy of performance is only part—and not a dominant part—of his aesthetic, it accounts for some positions and tendencies in his criticism. If we reconsider his text on the "Baudelairean cinema" in this light, the principle underlying its historical schema reveals itself. Time soon proved him wrong in announcing the death of "the symbolist-surrealist cinema of intellectual meanings." Within a year *Twice a Man, Scorpio Rising, Heaven and Earth Magic*, and much of *Dog Star Man* would be publicly screened for the first time; Ken Jacobs was about to begin shooting his most explicitly symbolical and mythopoeic film, *The Sky Socialist*. The fundamental change of the early 1960s within the avant-garde film, as I have shown in several places, was the emergence of the mythopoeic film, a direct descendant of the trance film, which had undergone a gradual but fragmented evolution in the 1950s.

In the "Baudelairean cinema" article, it seems to me that Mekas mistook a flurry of contemporary activity for the avant-garde tradition. He also seems to have equated the somnambulistic performances within the trance films with their total meaning while astutely sensing that the magnification of symbolism and the image of the possessed quester were intimately intertwined. What he did not foresee was a new form which could be even more symbolically and intellectually complex without the somnambulist.

To Mekas's credit one must add that in the early 1960s a dimension of social criticism entered at least some of the avant-garde films. The previous chapter touches upon some manifestations in California. Mekas's own film, *Guns of the Trees*, which is formally closer to *The End* than to the films of Cassavetes, Clarke, Rogosin, or Engel, was a social protest. *Scorpio Rising* can be viewed in this way. The films from this period by Stan Vanderbeek and Richard Preston, and of course Jacobs's *Star Spangled to Death* and *Blonde Cobra*, attack aspects of American society.

Jacobs, in his own highly personal view of the history of the avant-garde film, used the term "underground film," which became a journalistic commonplace after 1962. Stan Vanderbeek seems to have invented the term in 1961 (*Film Quarterly*, XIV, 4) to describe the period from the late 1950s until the mid-1960s, including his own films. Interestingly, Jacobs claims that period ended when avant-garde films became "fashionable." He partially blames Mekas for contributing to its end by "promoting a star system." It is true that an issue of *Film Culture* (Summer 1964) had a center section of photographs of "Stars of the New American Cinema," and, perhaps more to the point, Mekas dismissed the scope of *Star Spangled to Death* with a discussion of Smith's performance:

> I recently saw a rough cut of Jacobs' new film, *Star Spangled to Death*, a three-hour movie he has been shooting for the past seven years, and I was surprised to find in it the beginning of *Scotch Tape* and *Blonde Cobra* and the beautiful earliest work of Jack Smith where he does as good a job as the early Chaplin—which I know is a big statement, but you'll see someday it's true.[10]

This again is the manifestation of a sensitivity to performance and an excitement over new possibilities in acting. But neither the transition Mekas proposes from Symbolist-Surrealist to disengaged and free or that of Jacobs from "narcissistic" to Underground to "fashionable" transcends Mekas's or Jacobs's sense of himself at the center of things. When he made the "Baudelairean cinema" statement, Mekas obviously saw himself on the side of the free, looking backwards; Jacobs uses the underground platform to look in both directions.

Jonas Mekas's theoretical interest in performance had a more profound effect upon his criticism and his film-making when it intersected with his poetics. The concept of the self is the locus of that intersection. The title of Stanislavsky's book, as Mekas once pointed out to a group of young film-makers, is *The Actor Works upon Himself*. In "Notes on the New American Cinema," he says, "Improvisation is the highest form of condensation; it points to the very essence of a thought, an emotion, a movement." What had been a method of preparing actors to perform roles in plays becomes, in Mekas's transformation, the central process of the imagination:

> Improvisation is, I repeat, the highest form of concentration, of awareness, of intuitive knowledge, when the imagination begins to dismiss the prearranged, the contrived mental structures, and goes directly to the depths of the matter. This is the true meaning of improvisation, and it is not a method at all; it is, rather, a state of being necessary for any inspired creation. It is an ability that every true artist develops by a constant and lifelong inner vigilance, by the cultivation—yes!—of his senses.[11]

Jonas Mekas, following the initial efforts of Maya Deren, devoted much of his time and resources to sustaining a "visionary company"[12] of film-makers through his criticism and his organization of the Film-Makers' Cooperative, the Film-Makers' Cinematheque, the Friends of the New Cinema (which gave small grants to approximately twelve film-makers each year between 1964 and 1971), and Anthology Film Archives. Although his work is the most spectacular example of commitment to the vision of a community of film-makers, it is supported and reflected in similar but less sustained efforts by many of the film-makers I have been considering: Maya Deren as the first propagandist for the American avant-garde film

and the founder of the Creative Film Foundation, Frank Stauffacher as founder of Art in Cinema, Bruce Baillie as founder of the Canyon Cinema Cooperative, Peter Kubelka as designer of Anthology Film Archives' Invisible Theater, and Stan Brakhage as a lecturer and enthusiast, sometimes in the guise of a Savonarola, attempting to bridge the generations and geographical isolation of film-makers. To this list should be added Ken Jacobs as the first director of the Millennium Film Workshop between 1966 and 1968 which made equipment and instruction freely available to aspiring film-makers in New York.

But to return to the films of Ken Jacobs and Jack Smith, it is necessary to consider first a film-maker who exerted a considerable influence on both of them, as well as on Stan Brakhage, Larry Jordan, and Jonas Mekas. He is Joseph Cornell. I have already discussed Brakhage's encounter with Cornell at the turning point of his style. After years of correspondence, Larry Jordan spent several weeks during the summer of 1968 at Cornell's home in Queens, New York, assisting him in his well-known work as a collagist and box-maker. He also photographed, under Cornell's direction, a very evocative film of a trip to a graveyard.[13] Cornell gave him three related collage movies which he had been working on for several years with instructions on how to complete them. In 1970, under the sponsorship of Anthology Film Archives, where Cornell's films were made available to the public for the first time, Jordan completed all three—*Cotillion, The Midnight Party*, and *The Children's Party*.

Cornell's first collage film, *Rose Hobart* (later tentatively renamed *Tristes Tropiques*), was made in the late 1930s and first shown at Julien Levy's art gallery in New York. It represents the intersection of his involvement with collage and his love of the cinema; for Cornell had been for many years a collector of films and motion-picture stills. *Rose Hobart* is a re-editing of Columbia's jungle drama, *East of Borneo*, starring Rose Hobart. It is a breathtaking example of the potential for surrealistic imagery within a conventional Hollywood film once it is liberated from its narrative causality. In reducing the feature film to approximately fifteen minutes and replacing the soundtrack with music, he concentrates on the moods and reactions of the heroine. Since he often does not show to whom she is talking or to what she is reacting, her fears and anxieties seem to be in response to the very mystery which the collagist's editing has made of the film. Two men—an Asian in a turban and an American—and two women appear fleetingly throughout the film without revealing their roles.

Among his tactics to intensify fragmentation are cutting to a scene just before it fades out, combining in rapid succession a series of similar encounters, intercutting two scenes from different times as if they were simultaneous, and showing the closing or opening of a door without the person entering or leaving. Because of this fragmentation, certain images take on surrealistic dimensions, such as the natives driving crocodiles into the river with poles or a curtain pulled to reveal a belching volcano.

By the radical employment of hysteron-proteron which alters the logical order, the film-maker gives the impression of repetition and ruptures linear time and attendant causality. Several times he cuts from the dying or dead man with a turban to shots of him fully alive. At the end of the film, the man dies metaphorically; as Rose Hobart stands before his bed or his bier, the sun quickly passes through a full eclipse, and then, by a skillful joining of shots, seems to fall from the sky like a pebble into the pool we had seen before and disappear under a surface of slow-motion ripples. She lowers her head, as if reacting to his death in the final shot.[14]

Ken Jacobs, who worked very briefly for Cornell while he was making *Star Spangled to Death*, borrowed *Rose Hobart* to study and to show to Jack Smith. He described his reaction to the film:

> I was seeing Jack again and I told him, "Jack, you've got to see this movie." We looked at it again and again, and we were both knocked out. Jack tried to act at first like a little bit removed, like I was overstating it, and then he broke down and said, "No, it's very good." We looked at it in every possible way: on the ceiling, in mirrors, bouncing it all over the room, in corners, in focus, out of focus, with a blue filter that Cornell had given me, without it, backwards. It was just like an eruption of energy and it was another reinforcement of this idea I had for making this shit film [*Star Spangled to Death*] that would be broken apart and then again there would be an order.[15]

Although Jacobs describes his reaction to *Rose Hobart* in terms of the film he was making then, its influence extended to his 1969 film, *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son*. There he transformed an old American film into a modernist work, not by re-editing and showing it through a filter but by re-photographing it at different speeds, accenting the grain, and indeed performing a series of operations on it similar to the variations with which he had projected Cornell's film.

In his later films—both those photographed by Rudy Burkhardt, Stan Brakhage, and Larry Jordan and the collage films which Jordan completed—Joseph Cornell describes the marginal area where the conscious and the unconscious meet. These are films which affirm a sustained present moment in which a quality of reminiscence is implicated. Frequently, they share the themes of his boxes and collages and make allusion in their titles or their imagery to Romantic and Symbolist poetry, which had been a continual source of inspiration to him. Thematically, there are figures within each of the films who are proposed as tentative mediators, through whose consciousness these camera movements might be experienced.

In *A Legend for Fountains* there are three levels of mediation (a woman, children, birds). The first section, called "Fragments," establishes a series of motifs upon which the second section, without a title, elabo-

rates. A young lady slowly descends a dark staircase, passes through a hallway and out into the street. Looking down the same hallway, we immediately see her returning with the same slow pace. As if to record the time lost in that elliptical jump-cut, the camera shows "fragments" of her walk: she stares through the windows of a sandwich shop and a toy store; she hurries around a corner and rests against a wall covered with graffiti; her breath condenses in the cold air. The camera dwells on children she sees playing in the street; it slowly explores the graffiti and finally follows the flight of birds among the buildings above her.

The second and somewhat longer section repeats and extends the imagery of the first, beginning with the moments before she left the building. An opening title, ". . . your solitude, shy in hotels . . . ," quotes a source of inspiration for the film, Garcia Lorca's "Tu Infancia en Menton," from which the title also comes. The young lady sits by a window stroking a black cat. The camera observes her silhouette from inside, and her face can be seen under the reflections on the glass from without. When she leaves the building, the image fixes upon the reflections on the window of the moving door, as in the opening of Brakhage's *Anticipation of the Night*. Outside, the attention shifts between her, the birds on top of the buildings, the graffiti on the walls, and the children playing amid trashcans.

Whenever he was asked about the relationship between his films and his boxes and collages, Cornell denied that there was any. The films, he sometimes said, "never got off the ground." Nevertheless, they share a number of recurrent themes with the boxes: the child, the aviary, the hotel, and of course the window. The bits of letters and newspapers pasted to the back wall of some of his boxes function similarly to the graffiti-covered surfaces of *A Legend for Fountains*.

The serial structure, involving a return to and a reorganization of elements in two or more related works, which unites many of his boxes and collages, extends to his films. The double structure of *A Legend for Fountains* is one example. The most mystifying transformation by variation that he achieved in film was in making *Gnir Rednow*. He reversed left to right and printed backwards the film he had commissioned from Stan Brakhage, *Wonder Ring*, and in so doing, he introduced a differential which made the film characteristically his own. In the three collage films that Larry Jordan completed, the serial structure is very apparent. All three involve the re-editing of a film about a children's party that the film-maker found. He creates three related contexts of the child's consciousness by combining the dancing, feasting, and games of the party with circus acts, telescopes, constellations of stars, Zeus throwing thunderbolts in a primitive film, and windows.

What Jack Smith gained from seeing Cornell's first collage film remains a matter of speculation. Although his first long film, *Flaming Creatures* (1963), does not contain collage material, it involves the transformation and "liberation" of Hollywood stereotypes in an ironical recreation of the

The window as a veil in Joseph Cornell's *A Legend for Fountains*.

pseudo-Arabian world of Maria Montez films. His unfinished *Normal Love* (1963–) also draws upon the mythology of the conventional movies for its pantheon of monsters. In *No President* (1969), which was shown once and then dismantled, he incorporated a found documentary on the life of Wendell Willkie into a film of his own.

In 1963 and 1964 Smith published two articles in *Film Culture* which outline the way he views the cinema. The first was on Maria Montez and the second on Josef von Sternberg. Both of them assert that the essence of cinema is the visual in opposition to the narrative, which retards comprehension.

> People never know why they do what they do. But they have to have explanations for themselves and others.
>
> So Von Sternberg's movies had to have plots even tho they already had them inherent in the images. What he did was make movies naturally—he lived in a visual world. The explanations plots he made up out of some logic having nothing to do with the visuals of his films.[16]

He argues for an appreciation of Maria Montez films as pure cinema, once the narrative line is ignored:

> These were light films—if we really believed that films are visual it would be possible to believe these rather pure cinema—weak technique, true, but rich imagery. . . .
>
> The primitive allure of movies is a thing of light and shadows. A bad film is one which doesn't flicker and shift and move through lights and shadows, contrasts, textures by way of light. If I have these I don't mind phoniness (or the sincerity of clever actors), simple minded plots (or novelistic "good" plots), nonsense or seriousness (I don't feel nonsense in movies as a threat to my mind since I don't go to movies for ideas that arise from sensibleness of ideas). Images evoke feelings and ideas that are suggested by feeling.[17]

Visual truth, for Smith, reveals more than acting intends:

> But in my movies I know that I prefer non actor stars to "convincing" actor stars—only a personality that exposes itself—if through moldiness (human slips can convince me—in movies) and I was very convinced by Maria Montez in her particular ease of her great beauty and integrity.[18]

Applying the same perspective to von Sternberg, he discovers not only a plastic play of light and shadow but a revelation of sexual presence:

> His expression was of the erotic realm—the neurotic gothic deviated sex-colored world and it was a turning inside out of himself and magnificent. You had to use your eyes to know this tho because the sound track babbled inanities—it alleged Dietrich was an honest jewel thief, noble floosie, fallen woman, etc. to cover up the visuals. In the visuals she was none of those. She was V.S. himself. A flaming neurotic—nothing more or less—no need to know she was rich, poor, innocent, guilty, etc. Your eye if you could use it told you more interesting things (facts?) than those. Dietrich was his visual projection—a brilliant transvestite in a world of delirious unreal adventures. Thrilled by his/her own movement—by superb taste in light, costumery, textures, movement, subject and camera, subject camera/revealing faces—in fact all revelation but *visual* revelation.[19]

Nowhere has Jack Smith spoken as well about himself as in this passage allegedly about von Sternberg's Dietrich. *Flaming Creatures* deliberately manifests what he finds implicated in Maria Montez's and von Sternberg's films, and without the interference of a plot. When he brings to the fore what has been latent in those films—visual texture, androgynous sexual presence, exotic locations (the Araby of Montez's films or the Spain, China, and Morocco of von Sternberg's)—and at the same time completely dis-

cards what held these films together (elaborate narratives), he utterly transforms his sources and uncovers a mythic center from which they had been closed off. Ken Kelman, in the first article on *Flaming Creatures* in *Film Culture*, found that it "echoes with ancient ritual chant, with Milton and with Dante . . . for the very scope and scale of sin becomes demonic in a Miltonian sense, and *Flaming Creatures* might be subtitled *Pandemonium Regained*, a paean not for the Paradise Lost, but for the Hell Satan gained."[20]

Although Jack Smith dispenses with plot, he retains the structure of the scene in his film. There are ten scenes which blend into one another with deliberately obscured boundaries. Their sequence, for the most part, seems determined by rhythm and dramatic effect rather than by narrative. The move toward and away from a central core of three episodes in which the flaming creatures die in an orgy and, after an interlude, are reborn gives a centripetal form to the cyclic myth. The style of photography changes with the scenes, orchestrating them as if they were movements of a musical work.

Smith first encountered the use of outdated raw film to produce washed-out or high-contrast textures in Jacobs's *Star Spangled to Death*, but it was seeing Rice's *The Flower Thief* that convinced him of its possibilities. In *Flaming Creatures* he far exceeds either of these films in the employment of murky, burned-out, or high-contrast textures to create different depths and ranges of space. In the first scene, as figures pass back and forth in front of a poster on which the credits of the film have been ornately written, the gray, washed-out picture quality gives the impression that he was filming in a cloud. The narrowing of the tonal range obscures the sense of depth, which Smith capitalizes on by cluttering the panning frame with actors and with details of limbs, breasts, a penis, and puckered lips so that not only depth disappears but the vertical and horizontal coordinates as well.

By way of contrast, the subsequent scene takes place in the clearly defined space before a painted backdrop of a large white bush in a white flowerpot. He placed before it a transvestite in a white dress sniffing white flowers and a woman in a black nightgown. They flirt; she wiggles to the Spanish music playing throughout the scene; the transvestite waves a gloved hand; they meet, kiss, and pose together. The camera remains stationary, occasionally cutting to a closer shot, isolating just one of them. But before their relationship develops, the scene temporarily shifts to a group of creatures putting on lipstick in panning, mostly aerial views. The sound becomes the voice of an advertisement for "a new heart-shaped lipstick that stays on and on." When the film-maker's voice interrupts the advertiser to ask, "Is there a lipstick that doesn't come off when you suck cock?" he calmly answers, "Yes, indelible lipstick." Smith seems unconvinced. He asks, "But how does a man get lipstick off his cock?" to which the advertiser tartly replies, "A man is not supposed to have lipstick on his cock." Then he continues his unctuous pitch for the lipstick. The ad-

vertising voice is so authentic that there is a shock when he first answers the question. Before that, it might have been recorded directly from radio or television.

While the speech continues, the camera wanders over a tangle of nude and half-nude bodies so intertwined that they seem a single androgynous figure of many heads (all applying lipstick, including bearded men), breasts, and penises. But after two brief transitional tableaux—a group of creatures falling down in slow motion and a group composition with the sole of a dirty foot projecting out at the camera—the attention returns to the couple before the flowerpot backdrop. They chase each other back and forth offscreen to the left and right. The camera rests on the empty scene as one or the other rushes across the screen. There is no logic to the direction or sequence of their chase; the woman might move from right to left, her pursuer in the opposite direction; once they even cross paths. But eventually the transvestite captures and throws the woman in black to the floor.

Then the camera begins to vibrate, blur, and participate as the new scene, the orgy, commences. The creatures immediately converge upon their victim, strip her, smell her armpits, poke her genitals, and crawl over her. This rape sets in motion a general orgy which the camera, now wildly shaking, glimpses without making specific. Initially faint screams grow so loud that they drown out the music at the very moment when the orgy either sets off or coincides with an earthquake. The whole set goes into spasms; a lantern sways frantically; plaster falls from the ceiling on the writhing creatures, who seem to have intensified their frenzy in the knowledge that this might be their final bacchanal.

Their death evokes the myth of the seasons. Leaves fall upon their scattered bodies. Towards the end of the orgy the raped woman had staggered to her feet, but she collapsed and was dragged off by a second transvestite, past the dead and dying creatures. But when the now slow-moving camera returns to her, she and her abductor are also dead. The earthquake as a cosmic orgasm turned the *sparagmos* of the victim into the *sparagmos* of the bacchantes.

Amid passages of silence and bits of very low violin music, Smith dwells upon the empty scene. A bit of gauze blows before the familiar backdrop; the lantern lies broken on the floor; for a long time the image settles on a fly and his shadow on the white cloth of the backdrop. With a sudden burst of dated honky-tonk music, the lid of a coffin begins to move. But Smith cuts away to the void, and silence ensues, as if this shot had been premature. The proleptic image and its sound makes the empty shots that follow it all the more barren.

The myth of the vampire is invoked when Smith finally returns to the coffin scene. A transvestite Marilyn Monroe rises from it in a white burial gown, holding lilies. To the honky-tonk song, she stretches and surveys the dead bodies and debris; then she chooses a corpse to attack. Aroused in this act, she lifts her dress and begins to play with her penis. It is not

her being a vampire but her sexuality that signals the rebirth of the creatures. The lantern hangs again from the ceiling. Beneath it, the creatures dance—first the Monroe figure and her victim, then others as they revive and join in.

The concluding three scenes of the film are a sequence of ecstatic dances. In the first, all the creatures in white costumes dance together. The burned-out photography presents a dazzling effect of white on white and a depth of figure behind figure twirling and swaying in the crowded arena before the backdrop. Then a Spanish dancer in black drag with a rose in her teeth does a mad solo whirl to bullfight music. Finally, as if not to be upstaged, the Monroe figure appears puffing on a cigarette, filmed through the lantern. With the sound of the dated rock and roll record, "Be-bop-alula," she performs the final dancing rites intercut with a tableau of an odalisque, one breast exposed, surrounded by Arabs, one of whom points to her nipple.

The final third of *Flaming Creatures* is a continuous surge toward the ecstatic. The camera alternates between static and slowly panning shots of the dancing crowd and disorienting aerial views. The visual poles of black and white which the pursuing transvestite and the woman in the nightgown represented in the first half of the film are transposed to the white Monroe figure and the dark Spanish dancer in the second half.

To see *Flaming Creatures* is to understand some of Jack Smith's dissatisfaction with the way Ken Jacobs portrayed him or allowed him to reveal himself in *Blonde Cobra*. "Jack says I made the film too heavy," Jacobs says in his note for the fifth Film-Makers' Cooperative catalogue. The infantilism, cruelty, transvestism, and irony that contribute to the tragedy of delusions in *Blonde Cobra* reappear as factors in a myth of recovered innocence in *Flaming Creatures*, where the triumph may be ironic, but it is not at all problematic.

A triumph, in the sense of a triumphal march, is the subject of the film Jack Smith began to film immediately after finishing *Flaming Creatures*. In fact, he called it *The Great Pasty Triumph* before changing the title to *Normal Love*. In the rough cut that he exhibited in 1964, it was a paratactic parade of episodes describing a pantheon of monsters from horror films: the Mummy, the Werewolf, the Mongolian Child, the Spider, as well as the Mermaid, Cobra Woman, and assorted creatures more or less derived from the stock mythology of Hollywood. The projection of the rushes of these scenes throughout 1963 at midnight after the programs of the Film-Makers' Cinematheque or at Ron Rice's loft was the occasion for important meetings of film-makers, actors, and critics. Each episode was a self-contained, sensuous exploration of a simple event structured by scene, photographed on outdated color stock that produced ravishing expanses of pastel greens, pinks and blues.

Of all the major film-makers of the mythopoeic stage of the American avant-garde film, Jack Smith was perhaps the most gifted with imaginative powers. Each sequence of *Normal Love* as it was serially unveiled dem-

onstrated the sureness with which Smith could transform his creature-actors and the landscape in which he placed them into elements of a mythic vision of redeemed innocence and heightened sensuality. In slow, steady shots one could see the green Mummy wading after a nude woman in a pond a of waterlilies; the Mermaid taking a milk bath or having a mud-throwing fight with the Werewolf; a pier covered with the bodies of dead or sleeping transvestites in pink gowns projecting into the azure sea; the emerald Cobra Woman exploring a dark cave; a watermelon feast; a giant pink birthday cake with half a dozen creatures dancing on it, including a very pregnant woman.

Other film-makers, impressed by Smith's imaginative faculties, have thought of making use of his imagery. Ron Rice often accompanied Smith as he was shooting *Normal Love*. They tended to return to his loft with most of the cast, still in their costumes, after the day's filming. At first Rice made some casual film studies of the actors swinging on the hammocks in his loft. Later he expanded them into the production of *Chumlum* (1964).

The texture and structure of Rice's film is altogether different from Smith's. Throughout *Chumlum* there are usually at least two layers of moving imagery in superimposition. The compounding of figures, costumes, swinging movements, and the simultaneous fusion of side and aerial views flatten the space, thicken the pastel tones in deep and muddled colors, obscure the individual roles, and fragment the actions. *Chumlum* seems a continuously even, unaccented web of visual textures. The smoothness of the visual mesh is supported by the drone-like music of Angus MacLise on the chumlum, from which the title comes.

The fragmentation of events and the tactics suppressing internal modulations give Rice's film a sense of temporal suspension. The inclusion of punch-holes that usually are to be found at the beginning and end of a hundred foot strip of raw film and the apparent minimum of editing (the enjambment of different layers of superimposition suggests this) indicate that *Chumlum* is made up of approximately ten rolls of film composed in the camera. Unlike Harry Smith with *Late Superimpositions*, which was shot the same way, Rice did not accent the difference between the whole rolls in assembling them.

At the end of the film he shifts from indoor scenes, all shot in his studio, to an outdoor section. But he underplays this change by using a reel superimposing both indoors and outdoors at the very beginning. Within the center of the film, he seems to have subverted the natural order of the reels (that of the shooting) so that actions would appear inconclusive and repetitive. Toward the middle, he shows Jack Smith in an Arabian costume with a fake mustache, smoking hashish. The film becomes his reverie in which time is stretched or folded over itself.

In the outdoor conclusion, which intensifies the play of color and repetition, he shows the actors, still in their costumes, walking to a log house in the woods, their gowns and feet tangled in briars. He filmed this moment twice in superimposition, slightly out of synchronization, as a re-

solving metaphor for the "folded" temporality of the whole film. If there is a development or progress in the film, it is from indoors to outdoors, from swinging, crawling, and dancing in the harem to dancing in the sky over Coney Island (through superimposition)—an image which recalls the end of *The Flower Thief* where Taylor Mead dissolves into the sea.

Chumlum and *Late Superimpositions* belong with *Little Stabs at Happiness*, some of Larry Jordan's films, Brakhage's *Song V*, and Markopoulos's *Galaxie* and *Ming Green* as manifestations of the growing confidence in the early 1960s in the process of composing a film within the camera. This direct method found its spokesman and one of its leading practitioners in Jonas Mekas as he came to devote more and more of his energies to his film diary.

Unlike the literary diary, the film diary does not follow a day-by-day chronology. Structurally, it corresponds more to a notebook, but in its drive towards a schematic or fragmented expression of the totality of the film-maker's life, it is more like a diary, perhaps one in which the entry dates have been lost and the pages scrambled. Mekas and younger diarists such as Andrew Noren and Warren Sonbert devote their creative energy to shooting, constructing, and revising their filmed lives.

Mekas's *Diaries, Notes and Sketches* (1964–1969) and *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania* (1971) are exercises in Romantic autobiography. Mekas constantly weaves together celebrations of the present moment, immediately and unironically present on the screen, with elegiac and ironic allusions to a presence that is forever absent to the camera lens: the vision of nature and of his childhood. Like all of the films brought together in this chapter, Mekas's two diaries are versions of the myth of lost innocence and the failed quest for its recovery. The credo of his commitment to the Romantic dialectic is an article from 1964, "Notes on Some New Movies and Happiness," in which he combines observations on the films of Ken Jacobs, Ron Rice, Joseph Cornell, and others with thoughts on happiness and sadness from his childhood memories. He writes:

> It is neither a coincidence nor anything strange that exactly the same men who have tasted a fool's happiness, give us also the deepest intuitions of the tragic sense of life.
>
> Imitation of the true emotion. Sentimentality. No oneness. No true peace. (Who knows what true peace is?) Nostalgia of things of nature. Or are we going into neo-Romanticism? And what does it mean? Or am I going into neo-Romanticism? And this essay is nothing but pieces of my own new film? Perhaps.[21]

That new film was *Diaries, Notes and Sketches*. Mekas presented an extended synopsis on a giant sheet of paper to all the viewers at its premiere, prefaced by these remarks:

> This film being what it is, i.e., a series of personal notes on events, people (friends) and Nature (Seasons)—the Author won't mind (he is almost encouraging it) if the Viewer will choose to watch only certain parts of the work (film), according to the time available to him, according to his preferences, or any other good reason. . . .
>
> A note in the beginning says, that this is the First Draft of the Diaries. Why should the Author permit then, one may ask, the unpolished or half-polished edition to come out? His answer is, he thought that despite the roughness of sound and some parts of the images, there is still enough in them—he felt—to make them of some interest to some of his friends and a few strangers. In order to go to the next stage of polishing, he felt, he had to look at the footage as it is, many many more times, and gain more perspective to it—that's why this edition.

For a screening of this film at the Museum of Modern Art, Mekas wrote:

> Since 1950 I have been keeping a film diary. I have been walking around with my Bolex and reacting to the immediate reality: situations, friends, New York, seasons of the year. On some days I shot ten frames, on others ten seconds, still on others ten minutes. Or I shoot nothing. When one writes diaries, it's a retrospective process: you sit down, you look back at your day, and you write it all down. To keep a film (camera) diary, is to react (with your camera) immediately, now, this instant: either you get it now or you don't get it at all. To go back and shoot it later, it would mean restaging, be it events or feelings. To get it now, as it happens, demands the total mastery of one's tools (in this case, Bolex): it has to register my state of feeling (and the memories) as I react. Which also means that I had to do all the structuring (editing) right there, during the shooting, in the camera.[22]

In this text, which unites the return of "improvisation" with film construction, the film-maker is forgetting or underestimating the importance of editing and even more of sound of his own film. It is true that within an episode he sticks to the material as the scene was shot without restructuring except for inserting titles. When he says, a little later, that the materials were "strung together in chronological order," he is taking liberties; there were no violent disruptions of chronology, but some events were reshuffled. Of this I can be certain because my family and I appear in it achronologically. The very use of *Walden* as a structural element attests the editing architecture of the film.

The pixilated imagery, blazing by in fast motion, provides the central and most often repeated metaphor for the temporality of the present moment. The nostalgia for a deeper and more authentic nature is invoked in the passages of speech and the titles. "I Thought of Home" at the beginning and end of the film and "*Laukas*, A Field, as Wide as Childhood" in the first reel. The distance between the present moment and the nostalgia is repeatedly mediated by the text of *Walden*, for in *Diaries, Notes and Sketches* the language of the text, the titles, and the film-maker's voice is the sole vehicle of reconciling the exiled past—the author's childhood in Lithuania—with the film camera's dependence on the here and now of its visual substance.[23]

In his next film, *Reminiscences*, he uses the occasion of his first return to Lithuania in twenty-seven years to construct a dialectical meditation on the meaning of exile, return, and art. The film is in three parts. In the first, he put together all the footage he had made (since he first bought a camera in 1950) of his early life in New York, concentrating on the gatherings of Lithuanian exiles, who "looked to me like strange, dying animals, in a place they didn't belong to, in a place they didn't recognize," as the film-maker says in his commentary within the film. In the center of the film is the movement of return by way of "one hundred glimpses" of Lithuania, the film-maker's mother, his family. The elegiac tone of the opening part, accented by the space of twenty years between the photography and the editing, and the commentary by the author, disappears in the middle ode, which accepts the inability to return in space (to Lithuania) as well as in time (to childhood).

He resolves the contradictory movements of the first and second parts by celebrating the present with renewed vigor on the return trip via Vienna. There he shows us the lives of artists and thinkers (Hermann Nitsch and his castle, Peter Kubelka and the cellar where he makes wine, Wittgenstein's house, and the Americans Ken Jacobs and Annette Michelson, both visiting at the same time) whom he calls "Saints" in the identifying titles. By ending the film journal of his early years in New York and his long awaited return to Lithuania with portraits of his artist friends, one "pursuing his vision, without giving an inch, and heroically," another "who had the courage to remain a child in the purity of his seeing and his ecstasies," he defines his own triumph as an artist. In the last minutes he tells us, "I begin to believe again in the indestructibility of the human spirit."

"A child in the purity of his seeing" is not the most accurate expression Mekas could have found for Ken Jacobs's visionary stance. Ken Jacobs too has a dialectical relationship with the myth of recovered innocence. His most direct attempt at the mythopoeic film, *The Sky Socialist*, which was shot between 1965 and 1967 and revised in 1986, grew out of his urge to address a monumental work to the Brooklyn Bridge, which he could observe from his loft window and roof in lower Manhattan. Like Hart Crane, whom he had not seriously read, he posited from his contemplation

(a)

(b)

(a) The protagonist sees the sun fall like a pebble into the pool in Cornell's *Rose Hobart*.
(b) Peter Kubelka in pixilated sequence from Jonas Mekas's *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania*.

of the sheer magnificence of the bridge and the aspiration of the Roeblings, its builders, an eccentric form which weaves through history and invokes a sense of the divine in a world bereft (as far as Jacobs sees it) of divinity. In Crane's words,

> O Sleepless as the river under thee,
> Vaulting the sea, the prairies' dreaming sod,
> Unto us lowliest sometime sweep, descend
> And of the curveship lend a myth to God.

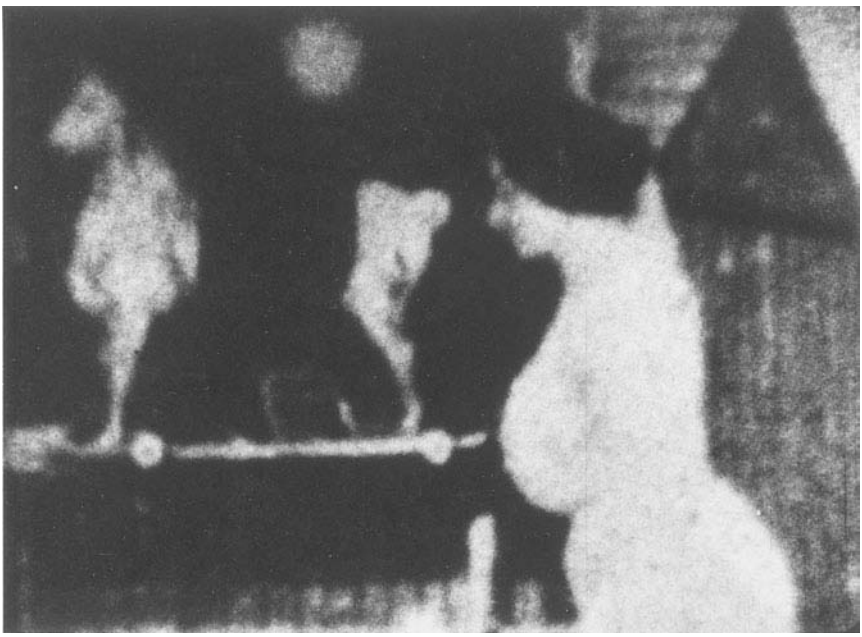
The inversion of a classical invocation, in which the bridge is asked to "lend a myth to God," is precisely the theme of Jacobs's film. "Roebling is the Sky Socialist," Jacobs has said, "and so am I as the maker of the film."

After a proem of zooming and sweeping pans of the bridge, the action settles (originally for three hours, in the 1986 version for ninety minutes) with occasional revisits to the bridge and the river, which the film-maker calls "choral interludes"—on the roof, where two people "stand in for" (rather than act the roles of) the dead Anne Frank and Isadore Lhevinne, the author of two obscure American novels, *Ariadne* (1928) and *Napoleons All* (1932), influenced by Symbolist prose. Despite the continual discouragement of Maurice, a fictive incarnation of the principle of despair, Isadore and Anne fall in love and marry.

The pace of *The Sky Socialist* is very leisurely; its movements are choreographed in a clearly defined deep space. In Jacobs's subsequent film, *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son*, that space contracts to the grainy screen of rephotography and its time becomes an involuted version of the structural film.

Tom, Tom begins and nearly ends with an old film of the same title made in 1905, quoted entirely both times. For approximately ninety minutes (the original lasts about ten minutes), Jacobs gives us his variations on the images and movements of that film. His *Tom, Tom*, as opposed to the original, has a grainy, pointillist texture (an inevitable result of filming off a screen or a homemade optical printer, which the structural cinema has capitalized on) and a compressed sense of space. In transposing, he changed the time of the original with slow motion, the scale with close-ups of background detail, the sequential order with repetitions and backward movements, and above all the kinesis by radically retarding the narrative of the original. Here the principle of elongation finds its clearest demonstration, which the structural cinema affirms in strong contrast to the beloved condensation of such film-makers as Anger, Brakhage, Belson, Markopoulos, Kubelka, and Breer.

Jacobs's film is didactic in a specifically modernist tradition. He has recovered the graphic genius of the original film's source for at least the first and last of its eight tableaux—Hogarth's *Southwark Fair*; for it is the imagery and backgrounds of this etching that the anonymous film-maker



Ken Jacobs's *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son*: flatness and grainy texture achieved through rephotography.

transposed to film. We see a sensual tightrope walker whirling a hoop in slow motion, a hunchback rolling over and over, a crowd falling one by one out of a barn and almost floating into a haystack. There are intimations of Picasso's harlequins as well.

Because of the directness of the mechanism he employs, *Tom, Tom* must be grouped with the structural films I shall discuss in the next chapter, despite Jacobs's tendency to rupture the forms of all of his films. In the three versions of the film I have seen, there is a marked difference of architecture. They each violate symmetry by appending a series of slow-motion details after the second presentation of the original film. The second version, however, introduces color inserts of a shadow play (another mixed form which Jacobs practices, especially in three-dimensional stereoscope) which violently interrupt the continuity of the black-and-white film. Visually they are relaxing (so the film-maker describes their function), but structurally they are extremely disorienting. More in keeping with the texture of the film, but nevertheless digressive, is a passage in the second and third versions in which the film-maker literally lifts away the screen off which the original is being "copied," and we are confronted with the flicker of the bare projector bulb behind the screen.

In the third version an even more aggressive passage shows an image jumping in the projector gate to the point of indecipherability by vertical

distortion. Audiences seeing this for the first time do not know if the projectionist has misthreaded or if what they are seeing is part of the film itself. He has thus incorporated within the film an aggressive factor similar to the use of the two radios in *Blonde Cobra*. As the jumping continues (and it continues for a very long time, seeming as if it were about to rectify itself only to jump again) it becomes evident that the strategy is deliberate.

To the film-maker himself, *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son*—a filmed nursery rhyme—is an exercise in "folded" temporality, and an attempt to recover an innocence in the childhood of the medium itself:

> Ghosts! Cine-recordings of the vivacious doings of persons long dead. The preservation of their memory ceases at the edges of the frame (a 1905 hand happened to stick into the frame . . . it's preserved, recorded in a spray of emulsion grains). One face passes "behind" another on the two-dimensional screen.
>
> The staging and cutting is pre-Griffith. Seven infinitely complex cinetapestries comprise the original film, and the style is not primitive, not uncinematic but the cleanest, inspired indication of a path of cinematic development whose value has only recently been rediscovered. My camera closes in, only to better ascertain the infinite richness (playing with fate, taking advantage of the loop-character of all movies, recalling with variations some visual complexes again and again for particular savoring), searching out incongruities in the story-telling (a person, confused, suddenly looks out of an actor's face), delighting in the whole bizarre human phenomena of story-telling itself and this within the fantasy of reading any bygone time out of the visual crudities of film: dream within a dream!
>
> And then I wanted to show the actual present of film, just begin to indicate its energy. A train of images passes like enough and different enough to imply to the mind that its eyes are seeing an arm lift, or a door close; I wanted to "bring to the surface" that multi-rhythmic collision-contesting of dark and light two-dimensional force-areas struggling edge to edge for identity of shape . . . to get into the amoebic grain pattern itself—a chemical dispersion pattern unique to each frame, each cold still . . . stirred to life by a successive 16–24 f.p.s. patterning on our retinas, the teeming energies elicited (the grains! the grains!) then collaborating, unknowingly and ironically, to form the always poignant-because-always-past illusion.[24]

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Structural Film

THE MOST SIGNIFICANT development in the American avant-garde cinema since the trend toward mythopoeic forms in the early 1960s was the emergence and development of what I have called the structural film.[1] The pattern which operated within the work of Maya Deren was echoed, as I have shown, in the entire thrust of the American avant-garde cinema between the late forties and the mid-sixties; on the simplest level it was a movement toward increased cinematic complexity. Film-makers such as Gregory Markopoulos, Sidney Peterson, Kenneth Anger, Stan Brakhage, and Peter Kubelka, to name a few of the most conspicuous, moved toward more condensed and more complex forms.

Since the mid-sixties a number of film-makers have emerged whose approach is quite different, although dialectically related to the sensibility of their predecessors. Michael Snow, George Landow, Hollis Frampton, Paul Sharits, Tony Conrad, Ernie Gehr, and Joyce Weiland have produced a number of remarkable films apparently in the opposite direction of that

formal thrust. Theirs is a cinema of structure in which the shape of the whole film is predetermined and simplified, and it is that shape which is the primal impression of the film.

The structural film insists on its shape, and what content it has is minimal and subsidiary to the outline. Four characteristics of the structural film are its fixed camera position (fixed frame from the viewer's perspective), the flicker effect, loop printing, and rephotography off the screen. Very seldom will one find all four characteristics in a single film, and there are structural films which modify these usual elements.

What then would be the difference between the lyrical film I have described and the structural film? What would be their relationship? The lyrical film too replaces the mediator with the increased presence of the camera. We see what the film-maker sees; the reactions of the camera and the montage reveal his responses to his vision. In the opening sequence of Hammid and Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon*, we found the roots of first-person cinematic consciousness. They filmed the first approach and exploration of the house from the point of view of the puzzled participant. But they immediately qualified—or mediated—that forceful opening by showing the figure of the protagonist in subsequent variations. In creating the lyrical film, Stan Brakhage accepted the limitations of that opening sequence as the basis for a new form. Out of the optical field and metaphors of the body's movement in the rocking gestures of the camera, he affirmed the film-maker as the lyrical first person. Without that achievement and its subsequent evolution, it would be difficult to imagine the flourishing of the structural film.

The four techniques are the more obvious among many subtle changes from the lyrical film in an attempt to divorce the cinematic metaphor of consciousness from that of eyesight and body movement, or at least to diminish these categories from the predominance they have in Brakhage's films and theory. In Brakhage's art, perception is a special condition of vision, most often represented as an interruption of the retinal continuity (e.g., the white flashes of the early lyric films, the conclusion of *Dog Star Man*). In the structural cinema, however, apperceptive strategies come to the fore. It is cinema of the mind rather than the eye. It might at first seem that the most significant precursor of the structural film was Brakhage. But that is inaccurate. The achievements of Kubelka and Breer and before them the early masters of the graphic film did as much to inform this development. The structural film is in part a synthesis of the formalistic graphic film and the Romantic lyrical film. But this description is historically incomplete.

By the mid-1960s the contributions of the lyrical and graphic cinema had been totally assimilated into avant-garde film-making. They were part of the vocabulary a young film-maker acquired at the screenings of the Film-Makers' Cinematheque or the Canyon Cinema Cooperative. They were in the air. The new film-makers were not responding to these forms

dialectically, because they situated themselves within them, no matter which films they preferred and which they rejected.

The major precursor of the structural film was not Brakhage, or Kubelka, or Breer. He was Andy Warhol. Warhol came to the avant-garde cinema in a way no one else had. He was at the height of his success in the most lucrative of American arts—painting. He was a fully developed artist in one medium, and he entered another, not as a dabbler, but with a total commitment. He immediately began to produce major cinema. For years he sustained that production with undiminished intensity, creating in that time as many major films as any of his contemporaries had in a lifetime; then, after completing *The Chelsea Girls* (1966), he quickly faded as a significant film-maker.

Warhol began to take an interest in the avant-garde film in 1963 when it was at the height of the mythic stage. He quickly made himself familiar with the latest works of Brakhage, Markopoulos, Anger, and especially Jack Smith, who had a direct influence on him. On one level at least—and that is the only level of importance to us—Warhol turned his genius for parody and reduction against the American avant-garde film itself. The first film that he seriously engaged himself in was a monumental inversion of the dream tradition within the avant-garde film. His *Sleep* was no trance film or mythic dream but six hours of a man sleeping. (It was to have been eight hours long, but something went wrong.) At the same time, he exploded the myth of compression and the myth of the film-maker. Theorists such as Brakhage and Kubelka expounded the law that a film must not waste a frame and that a single film-maker must control all the functions of the creation. Warhol made the profligacy of footage the central fact of all of his early films, and he advertised his indifference to direction, photography, and lighting. He simply turned the camera on and walked away. In short, the set of concerns which I have associated with the Romantic heritage of the American avant-garde film were the object of Warhol's fierce indifference.

Stephen Koch has something to say on this subject:

> The Duchampian game in which objects are aestheticized merely by turning to them with a certain glint in your eye does have continuing value, though not as the comical anti-art polemic so often ascribed to it . . .
>
> It is possible to understand this rather specialized aesthetic experience as a metaphor, in consciousness, for the perception of things at large, in which the unlike things compared and fused are the self and the world. . . . It is a major modernist procedure for creating metaphors, and an antiromantic one, since it locates the world of art's richness not in Baudelaire's "Elsewhere" but in the here and now. At least almost.

> Warhol goes further. He wants to be transformed into an object himself, quite explicitly wants to remove himself from the dangerous, anxiety-ridden world of human action and interaction, to wrap himself in the serene fullness of the functionless aesthetic sphere.[2]

Warhol defines his art "anti-romantically." Pop art, especially as he practiced it, was a repudiation of the processes, theories, and myths of Abstract Expressionism, a Romantic school. Warhol's earliest films showed how similar most other avant-garde films were and, to those looking closely, how Romantic. Yet whether or not the anti-Romantic stance can escape the dialectics of Romanticism is an open question. Koch seems to think it cannot:

> Transforming himself into the object celebrity, Warhol has made a commitment to the Baudelairean "resolution not to be moved"—an effort to ensconce himself in the aesthetic realm's transparent placenta, removed from the violence and emotions of the world's time and space. So Warhol turns out to be a romantic after all.[3]

The roots of three of the four defining characteristics of the structural film can be found in Warhol's early works. He made famous the fixed-frame in *Sleep* (1963), in which a half dozen shots are seen for over six hours. In order to attain that elongation, he used both loop printing of whole one-hundred-foot takes (2¾ minutes) and, in the end, the freezing of a still image of the sleeper's head. That freeze process emphasizes the grain and flattens the image precisely as rephotography off the screen does. The films he made immediately afterwards cling even more fiercely to the single unbudging perspective: *Eat* (1963), forty-five minutes of the eating of a mushroom; *Empire* (1964), eight continuous hours of the Empire State Building through the night into dawn; *Harlot* (1965), a seventy-minute tableau vivant with offscreen commentary; *Beauty* #2 (1965), a bed scene with off- and on-screen speakers lasting seventy minutes. Soon afterwards, he developed the fixed-tripod technique of reconciling stasis to camera movement. In *Poor Little Rich Girl: Party Sequence* (1965), *Hedy* (1966), and *The Chelsea Girls* (1966) he utilized camera movements, especially the zoom, from the pivot of an unmoving tripod without stopping the camera until the long roll had run out. Yet Warhol as a pop artist is spiritually at the opposite pole from the structural film-makers. His fixed camera was at first an outrage, later an irony, until the content of his films became so compelling to him that he abandoned the fixed camera for a species of in-the-camera editing. In the work of Michael Snow and Ernie Gehr, the camera is fixed in a mystical contemplation of a portion of space. Spiritually the distance between these poles cannot be reconciled.

In his close analysis of Warhol's early work, Koch views these films with the kind of intensity and perspective that the structural film-makers brought to them. He sees in them the framework of an apperceptive cinema. In the end of *Haircut* (1963), in which someone in a barber's chair, after a long stare into the camera, breaks into unheard laughter as the final roll of film flares up in whiteness, he sees "the cinematic drama of the gaze, reaching its final and reflexive development":

> The moment is a gently felt turn of self-consciousness suggesting the gentlest of put-ons—a put-on not in the sense of artistic fraud but that implied by a kind of Prosperolike cadenza (if I may compare great to small), a breaking of the spell. With it we realize that, like all the other early films, *Haircut* is about the hypnotic nature of the gaze itself, about the power of the artist over it.[4]

Koch sees that beyond the obvious aggressions and ironies of the early Warhol films—and perhaps because of them—there is a conscious ontology of the viewing experience. What the critic does not say is that these apperceptive mechanisms are latent or passive in Warhol's work. To the film-makers who first encountered these films the mid-sixties (those who were not threatened by them), these latent mechanisms must have suggested other conscious and deliberate extensions: that is, Warhol must have inspired, by opening up and leaving unclaimed so much ontological territory, a cinema actively engaged in generating metaphors for the viewing or rather the perceiving, experience.

Thus the structural film is not simply an outgrowth of the lyric. It is an attempt to answer Warhol's attack by converting his tactics into the tropes of the response. To the catalogue of the spatial strategies of the structural film must be added the temporal gift from Warhol—duration. He was the first film-maker to try to make films which would outlast a viewer's initial state of perception. By sheer dint of waiting, the persistent viewer would alter his experience before the sameness of the cinematic image. Brakhage had made a very long film in *The Art of Vision*, but he was apologetic about its four hours; it had to be that long and not a minute longer, he would claim, to say what it had to say. Ken Jacobs had been bolder or more honest in describing the endless and perpetually disintegrating experience of his projected *Star Spangled to Death*. But that too would have been a perversely orchestrated experience from beginning to end.

Warhol broke the most severe theoretical taboo when he made films that challenged the viewer's ability to endure emptiness or sameness. He even insisted that each silent film be shown at 16 frames per second although it was shot at 24. The duration of his films was one of slightly slowed motion. The great challenge, then, of the structural film became

how to orchestrate duration; how to permit the wandering attention that triggered ontological awareness while watching Warhol films and at the same time guide that awareness to a goal.

Not all of the structural films respond to the severe challenges of their form. Those instances of structural cinema in the filmgraphies of men who had worked successfully in other modes tend to use the frozen camera, loop printing, the flicker effect, and rephotography to open up new dimensions within the range of concerns that they pre-established in their earlier works.

Just why, at approximately the same time, Stan Brakhage, Gregory Markopoulos, Bruce Baillie, and Ken Jacobs began to extend their art in this direction is difficult to determine. Warhol's sudden shock-blow to the aesthetics of the avant-garde film was a factor, just as it was to film-makers like Michael Snow, Paul Sharits, George Landow and Hollis Frampton whose work largely lies within the domain of the structural film.

Michael Snow, the dean of structural film-makers, utilizes the tension of the fixed frame and some of the flexibility of the fixed tripod in *Wavelength*. Actually it is a forward zoom for forty-five minutes, halting occasionally, and fixed during several different times so that day changes to night within the motion.

A persistent polarity shapes the film. Throughout there is an exploration of the room, a long studio, as a field of space, subject to the arbitrary events of the outside world so long as the zoom is recessive enough to see the windows and thereby the street. The room gradually closes up its space (during the day, at night, on different film stocks for color tone, with filters, and even occasionally in negative) as the zoom nears the back wall and the final image of a photograph upon it—a photograph of waves. This is the story of the diminishing area of pure potentiality. The insight that space, and cinema by implication, is potential is an axiom of the structural film.

In a note for the fourth International Experimental Film Competition where it won first prize, Snow described the film:

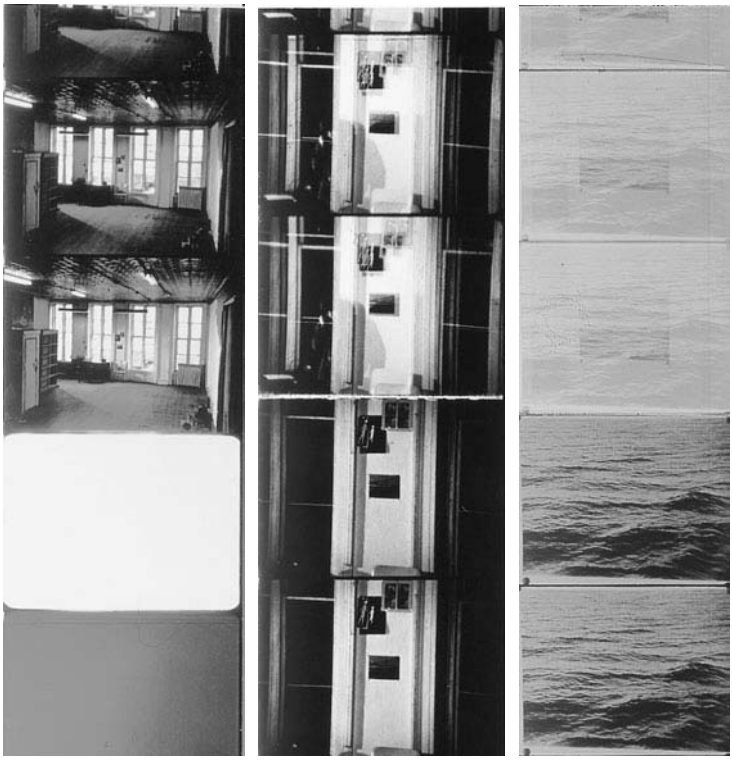
> *Wavelength* was shot in one week Dec. '66 preceded by a year of notes, thots, mutterings. It was edited and first print seen in May '67. I wanted to make a summation of my nervous system, religious inklings, and aesthetic ideas. I was thinking of planning for a time monument in which the beauty and sadness of equivalence would be celebrated, thinking of trying to make a definitive statement of pure Film space and time, a balancing of "illusion" and "fact," all about seeing. The space starts at the camera's (spectator's) eye, is in the air, then is on the screen, then is within the screen (the mind).
>
> The film is a continuous zoom which takes 45 minutes to go from its widest field to its smallest and final field. It was shot

> with a fixed camera from one end of an 80 foot loft, shooting the other end, a row of windows and the street. This, the setting, and the action which takes place there are cosmically equivalent. The room (and the zoom) are interrupted by 4 human events including a death. The sound on these occasions is sync sound, music and speech, occurring simultaneously with an electronic sound, a sine wave, which goes from its lowest (50 cycles per second) note to its highest (12000 c.p.s.) in 40 minutes. It is a total glissando while the film is a crescendo and a dispersed spectrum which attempts to utilize the gifts of both prophecy and memory which only film and music have to offer.[5]

He simplified the essential ambiguity in the film by describing one of the events as a death. The order of the actions is progressive and interrelated: a woman supervises the moving in of a bookcase; later she returns with another woman; they listen to the radio (a few phrases from "Strawberry Fields," pop culture's version of ontological skepticism) without talking; so far we are early in the film, the action appears random; midway through, a man breaks glass (heard offscreen) to get in an unseen door and climb the stairs (so we hear); he enters the studio and collapses on the floor, but the lens has already crossed half the room, and he is only glimpsed; the image passes over him. Late in the film, a woman returns, goes to the telephone, which, being at the far wall, is in full view, and in a dramatic moment which brings the previous events of the film into a narrative nexus, calls a man, "Richard," to tell him there is a dead body in the room. She insists that the man does not look drunk, but dead, and she says she will wait downstairs. She leaves.

Had the film ended at that point, the image of death would have satisfied all the potential energy and anticipation built up through the film. But Snow prefers a deeper vision. We see a visual echo, a ghost image in black-and-white superimposition of discontinuous flashes of the woman entering, turning toward the body, telephoning, and leaving. Then the zoom continues, as the sound grows shriller, into the final image of the static sea pinned to the wall, a cumulative metaphor for the whole experience of the dimensional illusion in open space.

The events of *Wavelength* occur first as discrete actions or irreducible performances. But the pivotal telephone call bridges the space between their self-enclosure and the narrative. Snow exposes his cinematic materials in *Wavelength* (even more so in his later film, whose title is the mark ↔) as momentary states within the work. The splice marks, flares of light, filters, different film stocks, and the focal interests of the room (the yellow chair against the far wall especially) create a calculus of mental and physical states, as distinguished from human events, which are as much a part of the body of the film as the actions I have dwelt upon. Things happen in the room of *Wavelength*, and things happen to the film of the room.



Three strips from Michael Snow's *Wavelength*.

The convergence of the two kinds of happening and their subsequent metamorphosis create for the viewer a continually changing experience of cinematic illusion and anti-illusion.

Annette Michelson finds this film a metaphor for consciousness itself. Her eloquent paraphrase reveals its relation to phenomenology:

> We are proceeding from uncertainly to certainty, as our camera narrows its field, arousing and then resolving our tension of puzzlement as to its ultimate destination, describing in the splendid purity of its one, slow movement, the notion of the "horizon" characteristic of every subjective process and fundamental as a trait of intentionality. That steady movement forward, with its superimposition, its events passing into the field from behind the camera and back again beyond it, figures the view that "to every perception there always belongs a horizon of the past, as a potentially of recollections that can be awakened; and to every recollection there belongs as an horizon, the continuous intervening intentionality of possible recollections (to be actualized

> on my initiative, actively up to the actual Now of perception." [Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*] And as the camera continues to move steadily forward, building a tension that grows in direct ratio to the reduction of the field, we recognize, with some surprise, those horizons as defining the contours of narrative, of the narrative form animated by distended temporality, turning upon cognition towards revelation.[6]

The very unsteadiness of the forward movement and its perceptible tiny jolts forward confirm Michelson's analysis. One of Snow's most interesting tactics is the superimposition of the forthcoming, slightly forward position on the one we are looking at, giving us for the length of that superimposition a static image of the temporal process. Its most effective employment is at the very end of the film when, after a long-held wide shot, the photograph of the waves, surrounded by a border of the wall to which it is pinned, suddenly shares its screen space with a view within the photograph. We anticipate, and when the older layer dissolves we experience, the illusory depth of the receding line of sight extending over the static sea.

The structural film—and *Wavelength* may be the supreme achievement of the form—has the same relationship to the earlier forms of the avant-garde film that Symbolism had to its source, Romanticism. The rhetoric of inspiration has changed to the language of aesthetics; Promethean heroism collapses into a consciousness of the self in which its very representation becomes problematic; the quest for a redeemed innocence becomes a search for the purity of images and the trapping of time. All this is as true of structural cinema as it is of Symbolism.

For Snow, making a film is a matter of "stating the issues about film." In an interview he said:

> I thought that maybe the issues hadn't really been stated clearly about film in the same sort of way—now this is presumptuous, but to say—in the way Cézanne, say, made a balance between the colored goo that he used, which is what you see if you look at it that way, and the forms that you see in illusionary space. . . . I was trying to do something very pure and about the kinds of realities involved.[7]

And in a letter following up the interview he added:

> I mentioned Cézanne in a comment about the illusion/reality balance in art in painting. Tho many other painters have worked out their own beautiful solutions to this "problem," I think his was the greatest and is relevant because his work is representational. The complicated involvement of *his* perception of exterior reality, his creation of a work which both *represents*

> and is something, thus his balance of mind and matter, his respect for a lot of levels are exemplary to me. My work is representational. It is not very Cezannesque tho. *Wavelength* and ↔ are much more Vermeer (I hope).[8]

Snow's direct confrontation with aesthetic endurance was *One Second in Montreal* (1969), where more than thirty still photographs of snow-covered parks are held on the screen for very long periods. The shape of the film is a crescendo-diminuendo of duration—although the first shot is held very long, the second stays even longer, and so on into the middle of the film, after which the measures begin to shorten.

One Second in Montreal is one of several structural films that encroach upon the domain of the graphic cinema. It can be said that *Wavelength* bridges the distance between the subjective and the graphic poles by zooming the depth of the loft into the flatwork of the photograph. In *One Second in Montreal* Snow inverted the micro-rhythmic preoccupations of Kubelka and Breer by organizing his film around temporal differences that are barely perceptible because the attention of the viewer is permitted to wander and to change during the long holds.

In ↔ (1969) and *The Central Region* (1971) the film-maker elaborated on the metaphor of the moving camera as an imitation of consciousness. The central fact of ↔ is velocity. The camera perpetually moving, left-right, right-left, passes a number of "events" which becomes metaphors in the flesh for the back-and-forth inflection of the camera. Each activity is a rhythmic unit, self-enclosed, and joined to the subsequent activity only by the fact that they occur in the same space. They provide a living scale for the speeds of camera movement, and they provide solid forms in the field of energy that the panning makes out of space.

The overt rhythm of ↔ depends upon the speed at which the camera scans from side to side or up and down. Likewise, the overt drama of *Wavelength* derives from the closing-in of space, the action of the zoom lens. The specific content of both films is empty space or rooms. It is the nature and structure of the events within the rooms which differentiate the modes of the films.

In the letter quoted earlier, Snow described ↔, which he was completing at the time:

> As a move from the implications of *Wavelength* ↔ attempts to transcend through motion more than light. There will be less paradox and in a way less drama than in the other films. It is more "concrete" and more objective. ↔ is sculptural. It is also a kind of demonstration or lesson in perception and in concepts of law and order and their transcendence. It is in/of/depicts a classroom. I think it will be seen to present a different, possibly new, spectator-image relationship. My films are (to me) attempts to suggest the mind to a certain state or certain states of conscious-

> ness. They are drug relatives in that respect. ↔ will be less comment and dream than the others. You aren't within it, it isn't within you, you're beside it. ↔ is sculptural because the depicted light is to be outside, around the solid (wall) which becomes transcended/spiritualized by motion-time whereas in *Wavelength* it is more transcended by light-time.[9]

In the film the camera pans back and forth outside a schoolroom while a janitor crosses, sweeping, from right to left. The remainder of the film, which is fifty minutes long, takes place within that room. For the first thirty-five minutes the camera repeatedly sweeps past events or "operations," to use the vocabulary of contemporary dance, usually separated from each other by passages of panning the empty room: a woman reads by the window, a class takes place in which the title symbol appears on the blackboard, a couple pass a ball, the janitor sweeps the floor, two men playfully fight, someone washes the window from outside, and a policeman looks in. The speed of the moving camera varies in relation to each event, sometimes to underline and sometimes to obscure the rhythm and axis of the activity; furthermore actors enter either by the door or suddenly appear and disappear through editing.

Midway through the film the event series ends. The camera accelerates, blurring the objects of the room, until the depth of space, which had been significantly asymmetrical—the camera being nearer one wall than the other—flattens into the two-dimensional. At the point of maximal speed the direction changes to the vertical and gradually slows to a stop. The film seems to have ended; the credits appear. Then the substance of the film is recapitulated in a coda.

The incessant panning of the camera creates an apparent time in conflict with the time of any given operation. In the film's coda, which is a recapitulation of all the events out of their initial order and in multiple superimposition, the illusions of temporal integrity dissolve in an image of atemporal rhythmic counterpoint as all the directions and parts of the film appear simultaneously.

In the letter I have quoted, Snow wrote: "If *Wavelength* is metaphysics, *Eye and Ear Control* is philosophy and ↔ will be physics." Later he explained what he meant by these analogies. For him *New York Eye and Ear Control* analyzes modes of action, philosophy being a curriculum extending from ethics to logic, but excluding metaphysics (for Snow, the religious and perceptive dimension and the locus of paradoxes) which is the specific domain of *Wavelength*. Michelson's brilliant analysis of the film does not account for its transcendental aura, which emerges, I believe, from the tension between the intentionality of the movement forward and the superhuman, invisible fixity of the tripod from which it pivots. That tension is in turn reflected and intensified by the corresponding opposition of the natural sounds to the electronic crescendo. And that tension climaxes in the final eerie plunge from the flat wall into the illusionary depth

of the motionless seascape. Snow writes that he placed his camera and tripod on a pedestal to get a view of the street beyond the window, and he "discovered the high angle to have lyric God-like above-it-all quality."

The nearly mechanical scanning movement of ↔ (he experimented with a machine that could swing the camera back and forth) takes a module of human perception and moves it in the direction of physical law, which denies to the human events it scans the internal cohesion of narrative, so that they in turn withhold from the camera the privilege of a fictive or transcendental perspective. Thus the film-maker compares the manifold to physics, or he can say, "You aren't within it; it isn't within you; you're beside it." Yet that does not exclude the possibility of an internal development within the film itself. In a text on *The Central Region*, he repeats and expounds his analogies:

> I've said before, and perhaps I can quote myself, "*New York Eye and Ear Control* is philosophy, *Wavelength* is metaphysics and ↔ is physics." By the last I mean the conversation of matter into energy. $E=mc^2$. *La Région* continues this but it becomes simultaneous micro and macro, cosmic-planetary as well as atomic. Totality is achieved in terms of cycles rather than action and reaction. It's *above* that.[10]

I take the analogy of "the conversation of mass into energy" to be a description of the climax of ↔ when the acceleration of the camera allows for a transition from the horizontal to the vertical and ultimately for simultaneous spaces and events in the superimposed coda.

The Central Region reconciles the structural metaphors of *Wavelength* and ↔. The central region of the title is a nearly barren plateau, void of people or any signs of their existence, and this region is also the sky above it, which the camera sweeps in 360-degree circles, explores in expanding or contracting spirals, and crosses in zig-zagging pans, focusing on the ground around its base in flowing close-ups and the distant horizon in zooming telephoto shots; but it is also the invisible spherical space which the camera, despite its ingenious equatorial mount which can mechanically perform more motions than the subtlest of film-makers holding his camera by hand, cannot see because it is itself. The whole visible scene, the hemisphere of the sky and the ground extending from the camera mount (whose shadow is visible) to the horizon, becomes the inner circumference of a sphere whose center is the other central region: the camera and the space of its "self." Nothing the camera passes acknowledges its existence, however tangentially; yet the film as a whole metaphorically describes the Romantic estrangement from nature; all of its baroque motions vainly seek an image in the visible central region that will illuminate the invisible one.

Curiously, this very unique film recapitulates the quests of two very different film-makers, Stan Brakhage and Jordan Belson. In its imagery and in its dynamics, *The Central Region* looks back upon *Anticipation of*

the Night, in which Brakhage's shadow self becomes the shadow of the camera mount. His exploration there through the moving camera of the child's awakening consciousness has its corollary in the opening spiral of Snow's film, where the space which the viewer must study for the next three hours gradually discloses itself as the image feels its way from close, out-of-focus ground to horizon. Their imagery coincides in visions of "moonplay"; the camera movement in both films makes the moon dance in the night sky. Brakhage ends with a defeating dawn; Snow includes a beautiful *aube* in the middle of his film. In many ways it is the most spectacular of the sixteen different sections, which vary from about three minutes to a half hour in length and are clearly punctuated by a glowing yellow × against a black screen. In the dawn scene, the slowly seeping light very gradually clarifies the landscape and at the same time allows us to perceive the camera movements. Brakhage's probing camera, unlike Snow's, is completely humanized. Its irregularities of movement are indices of the fictional self behind it. In its disembodied perspective the motion of *The Central Region* recalls that of *Samadhi* or *World*.

The crucial issue that separates Snow's disembodied viewpoint from Belson's is, of course, illusionist. Snow always incorporated an apperceptive acknowledgment of the cinematic materials and circumstances in his film. In the article on *The Central Region* he wrote:

> Most of my films accept the traditional theater situation. Audience here, screen there. It makes concentration and contemplation possible. We're two sided and we fold. . . . The single rectangle can contain a lot. In *Région* the frame is very important as the image is continually flowing through it. The frame is eyelids. It can seem sad that in order to exist a form must have bounds, limits, set, and setting. The rectangle's content can be precisely that. In *La Région Centrale* the frame emphasizes the cosmic continuity which is beautiful, but tragic: it just goes on without us.[11]

Belson's art seduces us away from the immediacy of the materials—the rectangular screen, the tripod, the focusing lenses—into an illusionary participation, while Snow's transcendentalism is always grounded in a dialogue between illusion and its unveiling.

The metaphysical culmination of *Wavelength* had been the moment of breaking through the photographic surface; the "physical" turning point of ↔ was the conversion of space into sheer motion. A similar conversion occurs in the last section of *The Central Region*. The camera circles so quickly that the motion is no longer read as camera movement and the landscape itself seems to fly. As the speed accelerates, the earth it photographs forms a spinning ball until the last image of the film defines the central region as a planet in space, recalling the same metaphor for consciousness in most of Belson's work.

Paul Sharits's films are devoid of mystical or cosmological imagery, but they aspire to induce changes of consciousness in their viewers.[12] Writing about his most successful flicker film, N:O:T:H:I:N:G (1968), he uses the language of Tibetan Buddhism:

> The film will strip away anything (all present definitions of "something") standing in the way of the film being its own reality, anything which would prevent the viewer from entering totally new levels of awareness. The theme of the work, if it can be called a theme, is to deal with the non-understandable, the impossible, in a tightly and precisely structured way. The film will not "mean" *something*—it will "mean," in a very concrete way, nothing.
>
> The film focuses and concentrates on two images and their highly linear but illogical and/or inverted development. The major image is that of a lightbulb which first retracts its light rays; upon retracting its light, the bulb becomes black and, impossibly, lights up the space around it. The bulb emits one burst of black light and begins melting; at the end of the film the bulb is a black puddle at the bottom of the screen. The other image (notice that the film is composed, on all levels, of dualities) is that of a chair, seen against a graph-like background, falling backwards onto the floor (actually, it falls against and affirms the edge of the picture frame); this image sequence occurs in the center, "thig le" section of N:O:T:H:I:N:G. The mass of the film is highly vibratory color-energy rhythms; the color development is partially based on the Tibetan Mandala of the Five Dhyani Buddhas which is used meditation to reach the highest level of inner consciousness—infinite, transcendental wisdom (symbolized by Vairocana being embraced by the Divine Mother of Infinite Blue Space). This formal-psychological composition moves progressively into more intense vibration (through the symbolic colors white, yellow, red and green) until the center of the mandala is reached (the center being the "thig le" or void point, containing all forms, both the beginning and end of consciousness). The second half of the film is, in a sense, the inverse of the first; that is, after one has passed through the center of the void, he may return to a normative state retaining the richness of the revelatory "thig le" experience. The virtual shapes I have been working with (created by rapid alternations and patterns of blank color frames) are quite relevant in this work as is indicated by this passage from the Svetasvatara Upanishad: "As you practice meditation, you may see in vision forms, resembling snow, crystal, smoke, fire, lightning, fireflies, the sun, the moon. These are signs that you are on your way to the revelation of Brahman."

> I am not at all interested in the mystical symbolism of Buddhism, only in its strong, intuitively developed imagistic power. In a sense, I am more interested in the mantra because unlike the mandala and yantra forms which are full of such symbols, the mantra is often nearly pure nonsense—yet it has intense potency psychologically, aesthetically and physiologically. The mantra used upon reaching the "thig le" of the Mandala of the Five Dhyani Buddhas is the simple "Om"—a steady vibrational hum. I've tried to compose the center of N:O:T:H:I:N:G, on one level, to visualize this auditory effect.[13]

Kubelka has posited *Arnulf Rainer* as the absolute pole of "strong articulations," the split-second collision of opposites, black and white, silence and white sound. In *The Flicker*, Tony Conrad extended that technique to an area of meditative cinema by orchestrating smooth transitions between white dominance and black dominance and by keeping his piercing soundtrack at an even level. Lacking the internal modulation of *Arnulf Rainer, The Flicker* uses the aggressive speed of the flicker effect to suggest a revelatory stasis or very gradual change.

When Paul Sharits made the first color flickers—*Ray Gun Virus* (1966) and *Piece Mandala/End War* (1966)—he further softened the inherent strong articulations. Pure colors when rapidly flashed one after the other tend to blend, pale, and veer toward whiteness. By the time he made N:O:T:H:I:N:G he had learned how to control these apparent shifts and to group his color bursts into major and minor phrases with, say, a pale blue dominant at one time, a yellow dominant at another. From the very beginning the screen flashes clusters of color, while the sound suggests a telegraphic code, chattering teeth, or the plastic click of suddenly changing television channels.

In the middle of the chain of color changes he shows us an image interlude of a chair animated in positive and negative. It floats down the screen, away into nothing, or the near nothing of the mutually effacing colors. The interlude is marked by the sound of a telephone. From early on, the film is continually interrupted for short periods by the two-dimensional image of a light bulb dripping its vital light fluid.

Sharits molds the viewer's attention and punctuates it by incorporating into his seemingly circular flicker films (the mandala is his chosen shape) linear signs for determining how much of the film's time has expired, how much is yet to come. The dripping bulb is one such clock; we anticipate that the film will end when it does. Ken Jacobs shows us the original *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son* first so that we can gauge the development of his variations, only to trick us at the end, as Nelson does when he lies about the time of *Bleu Shut*. Sharits, however, seems to be interested in maintaining the purity of the relation between the duration of his films and the internal expectations and milestones they generate.

In T,O,U,C,H,I,N,G (1968) he spells the title out, letter by letter, beginning with the T and ending the film with the G. Here still images begin to assume equal weight with the color flicker. Single-frame shots of a shirtless young man flash in positive and negative, both color and black-and-white. In some of the shots he holds his tongue in a scissors as if about to cut it off; in others a woman's fingernails are scratching his face. Two different stills of the scratching, in quick succession, test the spectator's tendency to elide them into an illusion of movement. Mixed with these icons of violence are a photograph of an operation in color and a close-up of genitals in intercourse in black-and-white. All through the film the word "destroy" is repeated by a male voice in a loop. Eventually the ear refuses to register it, and it begins to sound like other words.

He makes similar use of the word "exochorion" in his subsequent film S:TREAM:S:S:ECTION:S:ECTION:S:S:ECTIONED (1970), this time spoken fugally with similar words by female voices. On the screen we see, for the first time in a Sharits film, a moving image—flowing water.

While the cycles of water current decrease three times in layers of superimposition from six to one, the number of vertical scratches on the film steadily increases in increments of three. The viewer clocks the film in relation to his expectation that when there is no more room for three additional scratches the film will end.

The multiple superimposition of water flowing in different directions initially presents a very flat image. But the subsequent scratches, which are deep, ripping through the color emulsion to the pure white of the film base and often ploughing up a visual residue of filmic matter at the edges, affirm a literal flatness which makes the water appear to occupy deep space by contrast.

The dilemma of Sharits's art has turned on the failure of his imagery to sustain its authority in the very powerful matrix of the structures he provides. His search for metaphors and icons for the particular kind of cinematic experience that his films engender has not been as successful as his invention of markers to reflect the duration of his films. In N:O:T:H:I:N:G the off-balance, empty chair and the draining light bulb allude to the floating, almost intoxicating experience the seated viewer feels after extended concentration on flickering colors, pouring from the projector bulb. The metaphors of T,O,U,C,H,I,N,G totalize the suicidal and sexual inserts of *Ray Gun Virus* and *Piece Mandala/End War* and represent the viewing experience as erotic violence. Curiously in S:S:S:S:S:S:S he represents, unwittingly of course, the metaphor Kubelka is so fond of elaborating for the structure of *Schwechater*; in his lectures he always compares that film to the flowing of a stream. In Sharits's film too, the complexly deflected water flows are like the illusory movement of cinema. However, these metaphors either lack the immediacy of the color flickers or the scratches around them, or they overpower their matrix, as in T,O,U,C,H,I,N,G, and instigate a psychological vector which the form can-

Flicker and sparagmos: Paul Sharits's *T,O,U,C,H,I,N,G*.

not accommodate as satisfactorily as the trance film or the mythopoeic film.

It is precisely such a gift for finding the apperceptive trope that distinguishes George Landow's films. His first film, *Fleming Faloon* (1963), is a precursor of the structural tendency. The technique of direct address is at the center of its construction. The film begins with two amateurs reciting "Around the world in eighty minutes"; then it contains jump-cuts of a TV newscaster and image upon image of a staring face, sometimes full screen, sometimes as the object of a dollying camera with the face superimposed upon itself. At other times the film splits into four images (unsplit 8mm photography in which two sets of two consecutive images appear in the 16mm frame). Televisions, mirrored televisions, and superimposed movies are interspersed.

In *Film in which there appear sprocket holes, edge lettering, dirt particles, etc.* (1966), he derived his image from a commercial test film, originally nothing more than a woman staring at the camera, in which a blink of her eye is the only motion, with a spectrum of colors beside her. Landow had the image reprinted so that the woman and the spectrum occupied only one half of the frame, the other half of which is made up of sprocket holes frilled with rapidly changing edge letters, while on the far right, half of the woman's head appears again.

When the strip was to become *Film in which*, Landow instructed the laboratory not to clean the dirt from the film and to make a clean splice that would hide the repetitions. The resulting film, a found object extended to a simple structure, is the essence of minimal cinema. The woman's face is static—perhaps a blink is glimpsed; the sprocket holes do not move but waver slightly as the system of edge lettering flashes around them. Deep into the film the dirt begins to form time patterns, and the film ends.

Bardo Follies (1966) refers in its title to the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*. The film begins with a loop-printed image of a water flotilla moving past a woman who waves to us at every turn of the loop. After about ten minutes (there is a shorter version too) the same loop appears doubled into a set of circles against the black screen. Then there are three circles for an instant. The film image in the circles begins to burn, creating a moldy, wavering, orange-dominated mass. Eventually the entire screen fills with one burning frame which disintegrates in slow motion in an extremely grainy soft focus. Another frame burns, and the whole screen throbs with melting celluloid. Probably this was created by several generations of photography off the screen—its effect is to make the screen itself seem to throb and smolder. The anticipatory tension of the banal loop is maintained throughout this section in which the film stock itself seems to die. After a long while it becomes a split screen of bubbles created when the projector lamp burns emulsion, with a different color on each side of the screen. Through changes of focus the bubbles lose shape and dissolve into one another. Finally, some forty minutes after the first loop, the screen goes white.

In *The Film That Rises to the Surface of Clarified Butter* (1968), Landow extends the structural principle of the loop into a cycle of visions. Here we see in black-and-white the head of a working animator; he draws a line, makes a body; then he animates a grotesque humanoid shape. In negative a woman points to the drawing and taps on it with a pencil. This sequence of shots—the back of the animator, the animation, the negative woman looking at it—occurs three times, but sometimes there is more negative material in one cycle than in another. Next we see the animator, this time from the front; he is creating a similar monster; he animates it. Again we see him from the front; again he animates it. Such is the action of the film. A wailing sound from Tibet accompanies the whole film. The title as well is Eastern: Landow read about "the film that rises to the surface of clarified butter" in the *Upanishads*.

The ontological distinction between graphic, two-dimensional modality (the monsters) and photographic naturalism (the animators, even the pen resting beside the monsters as they move in movie illusion), which is used as a metaphor for the relation of film itself (a two-dimensional field of illusion) to actuality, is a classic trope implicit since the beginning of animation and explicit countless times before Landow. Yet this is the first film constructed solely around this metaphor.

Landow's structural films are all based on simple situations: the variations on announcing and looking (*Fleming Faloon*), the extrinsic visual interest in a film frame (*Film in which there appear sprocket holes, edge lettering, dirt particles, etc.*), a meditation on the pure light trapped in a ridiculous image (*Bardo Follies*), and the echo of an illusion (*Film That Rises to the Surface of Clarified Butter*). His remarkable faculty is as maker of images, for the simple found objects (*Film in which* and the beginning of *Bardo Follies*) he uses and the images he photographs are radical, superreal, and haunting.

Several film-makers extended their aspirations for an unmediated cinema which would directly reflect or induce states of mind and which first generated the structural film, into a participatory form which addressed itself to the decision-making and logical faculties of the viewer. George Landow and Hollis Frampton were the most significant film-makers to span the transition from structural to participatory modes.[14] This shift marks an evolution *within* the structural film.

Institutional Quality (1969), *Remedial Reading Comprehension* (1971), and *What's Wrong with This Picture?* (1972) constitute Landow's contribution to this development. As in all his previous films the form of *Institutional Quality* is closed and more or less dominated by a single image. In this case it is a schoolmarm, administering to the viewer experiences reminiscent of childhood psychological perception tests and the television series *Winky Dink and You*, in which children were encouraged to draw upon a transparent sheet over the television screen, guided by an instructor on the air. Landow's teacher instructs us, "There is a picture on your desk," and we see a bourgeois living room whose only sign of motion

is the banding fluctuation of its television screen. The instructions of the teacher remain accurately within the rhetoric of testing, but the montage of the film and the apperceptive condition of the viewer make these instructions ironic. After calling our attention to the picture of the living room, she says, "Do not look at the picture," an order that the film spectator must blatantly ignore. At the end when she says "Now write your first name and your last name at the bottom of the picture," the image flares to white before we see that the film-maker has written his name at the end of his picture: "By George Landow."

When the voice instructs the viewer to put the number 3 over the object one would touch to turn on the television, a hand as big as the whole living room appears and pencils a three on the television screen, which destroys our illusion of scale and indicates the literal flatness of our own motion picture screen. Throughout the film the voice continues these instructions, and whenever the living room is visible, the hand obeys. There is no let-up in the voice, but more and more the image cuts away from the middle-class living room to pictures and questions about 8mm and 16mm films. The numbering of the objects in the room is reflected in the printed numbers over the picture of a projector indicating its operating parts. In a final didactic gesture, titled "A Re-Enactment" in letters printed over the image, an embarrassed and giggling woman demonstrates the threading procedure for loading an 8mm projector. "A Re-Enactment" is itself part of the television rhetoric used to describe the dramatization of the comparative testing of similar products within a commercial.

The fumbling and embarrassed performance of the demonstrator points up Landow's growing concern with facsimiles and counterfeits. In the second part of *What's Wrong with This Picture?* he remade an instructional film about civic ethics, with slight flaws. The shaky superimpositions and the quality of performance in the demonstration of equipment in *Institutional Quality* participate in this aesthetic of faulty facsimiles.

In *Remedial Reading Comprehension* he repeats and varies many of the tactics of the previous film, but this time he includes an actual found object along with his counterfeits. A speed-reading training film flashes short phrases from a sequential text. The whole of *Remedial Reading Comprehension* is a film of short phrases in an ambiguously didactic sequence. Dream inspiration and academic education are conflated in an opening that cuts from a sleeping woman to a classroom, expanding from a corner of the screen above her as if it were a "balloon" until it fills the screen, blotting her out. At the cry of "lights," a faked commercial for rice appears, contrasting a grain of brown rice with one of converted rice.

The act of reading is amplified by bracketing two images of the film-maker running in flattened space created by rephotography off a screen; over his doubly superimposed picture appears the statement, "This Is A Film About You." When the running image returns, the sentence concludes. "Not About Its Maker."

Landow has referred to these films as an autobiography. It is an autobiography, or more exactly a *bildungs-roman*, devoid of psychology, moving in an elliptical leap from childhood and grammar school to college. Hollis Frampton too has used the participatory film for the indirect and serial "autobiography," *Hapax Legomema*, a title derived from classical philology, referring to those words of which only one instance survives in the ancient texts.

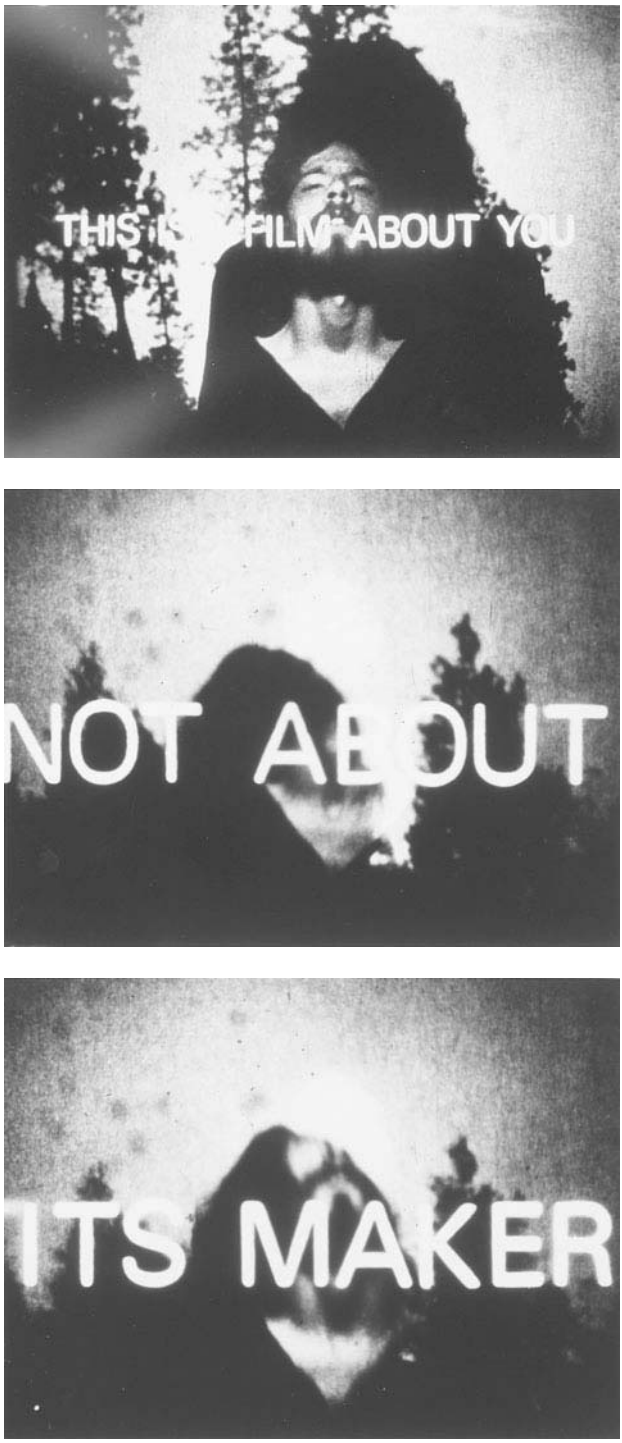
Just before embarking on the serial film, Frampton completed his major work, *Zorns Lemma* (1970). This film is divided into three sections: an initial imageless reading of the *Bay State Primer*; a long series of silent shots, each one second long of photographed signs edited to form one complete Latin alphabet; and finally a single shot of two people walking across a snow-covered field away from the camera to the sound of a choral reading.

The first of several intellectual orders which Frampton provides as structural models within the film is, of course, the alphabet. *The Bay State Primer* announces, and the central forty minutes of this hour long film elaborates upon it. Within that section a second kind of ordering occurs; letters begin to drop out of the alphabet and their one-second pulse is replaced by an image without a sign. The first to go is X, replaced by a fire; a little later Z is replaced by waves breaking backwards. Once an image is replaced, it will always have the same substitution; in the slot of X the fire continues for a second each time, the sea rolls backwards at the end of each alphabet once the initial substitution occurs. On the other hand, the signs are different in every cycle.

The substitution process sets in action a guessing game and a timing device. Since the letters seem to disappear roughly in inverse proportion to their distribution as initial letters of words in English, the viewer can with occasional accuracy guess which letter will drop out next. He also suspects that when the alphabet has been completely replaced, the film or the section will end.

A second timing mechanism exists within the substitution images themselves, and it gains force as the alphabetic cycles come toward a conclusion. Some of the substitution images imply their own termination. The tying of shoes which replaces P, the washing of hands (G), the changing of a tire (T), and especially the filling of the frame with dried beans (N) add a time dimension essentially different from that of the waves, or a static tree (F), a red ibis flapping its wings (B), or cattails swaying in the wind (Y). The clocking mechanism of the finite acts is confirmed by their synchronous drive toward completion which becomes evident in the last minutes of the section.

In an elaborate set of notes on the film and its generating formulas, Frampton even describes its structure as autobiographical, the three parts corresponding to his Judeo-Christian upbringing, his development from being a poet to a film-maker while living in New York City, which is the



George Landow in *Remedial Reading Comprehension*: the text declares the participatory film's paradoxical inversion of the trance film.

background of the signs and replacements, and finally a prophecy of his move to the country. He lists the criteria for choosing the replacements as:

> 1. banality. Exceptions: S, C (animal images);
> 2. "sculptural" as distinct from "painterly" (as in word-images) work being done, i.e. illusion of space or substance consciously entered and dealt with, as against mimesis of such action. Exceptions D.K (cutting cookies, digging a hole);
> 3. Cinematic or para-cinematic reference, however oblique. To my mind *any* phenomena is para-cinematic if it shares *one* element with cinema, e.g. modularity with respect to space or time.
>
> Consider also the problems of alternating scale, and maintaining the fourfold HOPI analysis: CONVERGENT VS. NON-CONVERGENT/ RHYTHMIC VS. ARHYTHMIC.[15]

In the final section the visual pulse shifts to the aural level as six women recite the translation of Grosseteste's "On Light, or the Ingression of Forms" in phrases one second apiece. His decision to allow one second to be the pulse of his film attempts to replace Kubelka's reduction to the metric of the machinery (the single frame) with an arbitrary tempo. This is one of several totalizations and parodies of the quests of the graphic film in *Zorns Lemma*. The blank screen of the opening section had been one; secondly, by mixing flat collages with the actual street signs in the middle section, he compounded the paradoxes of reading and depth perception that the graphic film inherited from Léger, and which Landow explored in his participatory films.

In *Zorns Lemma* Frampton followed the tactics of his two elected literary masters, Jorge Luis Borges and Ezra Pound. From Borges he learned the art of labyrinthine construction and the dialectic of presenting and obliterating the self. Following Pound, Frampton has incorporated in the end of his film a crucial indirect allusion; it is to the paradox of *Arnulf Rainer*'s reduction. In Grosseteste's essay, materiality is the final dissolution, or the point of weakest articulation, of pure light. But in the graphic cinema that vector is reversed. In the quest for sheer materiality—for an image that would *be*, and not simply *represent*—the artist seeks endless refinement of light itself. As the choral text moves from Neoplatonic source-light to the grosser impurities of objective reality, Frampton slowly opens the shutter, washing out his snowscape into the untinted whiteness of the screen.

Zorns Lemma takes its title from set theory, where it seems that "every partially ordered set contains a maximal fully ordered subset." The units of one second each, the alphabets, and the replacement images are ordered sets within the film. Our perception of the film is a participation in the discovery of the ordering. Other Frampton films derive their titles from specialized disciplines—physics in the case of *States* (1967/1970), *Max-*

well's Demon (1968), *Surface Tension* (1968), and *Prince Rupert's Drops* (1969), and philology in *Palindrome* (1969)—and take their structural models from the academic disciplines.

A film such as *Zorns Lemma* must come about from an elaborate preconception of its form. That kind of preconception is radically different from the organicism of Markopoulos, Brakhage, Baillie, and indeed most of the film-makers treated in the early and middle chapters of this book. In the elaborate chain of cycles and epicycles which constitutes the history of the American avant-garde film, the Symbolist aesthetic which animated the films and theories of Maya Deren returns, with a radically different emphasis, in the structural cinema. Although dream and ritual had been the focus of her attention, she advocated a chastening of the moment of inspiration and a conquest of the unconscious, a process which she associated with Classicism. The film-makers who followed her pursued the metaphors of dream and ritual by which she had defined the avant-garde cinema, but they allowed a Romantic faith in the triumph of the imagination to determine their forms from within. From this aesthetic submission grew the trance and the mythopoeic film. When the structural cinema repudiated the credo that film aspires to the condition of dream or myth, it returned to the Symbolist aesthetic that Deren had defined, and in finding new metaphors for the cinematic experience with which to shape films, it reversed the earlier process so that a new imagery arose from the dictates of the form.

thirteen

The Seventies

NOTHING LIKE THE peaks of excitement which had occurred in 1963 or 1968 was to be repeated in the subsequent decade. A great many of the most important films made during the period were the works of already established film-makers, although a few significant new names will be introduced in the pages that follow. In general it was a decade of new and different kinds of showcases for avant-garde films, and of the incorporation of film-makers and their films into the academic establishment. The previously undisputed pre-eminence of the American avant-garde was powerfully challenged by several flourishing movements in Europe, especially in Germany and England. Finally, the rudimentary development of an art of video drew some attention and excitement away from avant-garde film-making.

Within the internal history of cinematic forms constituted by the major new films three loosely related tendencies have dominated: (1) there has been a revitalization of the interest, both practically and theoretically, in the relationship between

images and words. This is not merely a return to the issues of the 1950s which generated a widespread concern about the interpenetration of poetry and cinema. It is above all a dialectical development of the issues raised in the phase I have called "structural film." (2) An elaborate autobiographical genre has emerged, often coinciding with the examination of the image/language relationship. In certain crucial cases language has been the means of redefining, within autobiographical films, the temporality of the film-making and film-viewing experiences. (3) The tendency toward a reduction and "purification" of the cinematic image continued and even grew stronger during the seventies.

Since historical change necessities a re-evaluation of origins, perhaps it would be useful to step back and re-examine a major avant-garde film of the twenties in the light of its repercussions in the seventies. Therefore, before analyzing the central films of the decade, I would like to consider some of the achievements of Marcel Duchamp's *Anémic Cinéma* (1926).

For Duchamp the word "cinema" yields the anagram "anemic." His film is both an "anemic" example of cinema (a work reduced almost to bloodlessness through the radical constriction of representational space) and perversely a demonstration of the "anemia" of all cinema. Eight disks of different graphic spirals alternate with eight on which elaborate puns have been printed spirally, so that each sentence begins at the perimeter and ends at the center of the revolving circle. The motion of the camera records their illusionary movement. Although there is no ontological difference between the image of a moving disk with concentric (and eccentric) circles and the image of a similar disk with letters rather than spiral lines, the automatic optical response of the viewer shifts at each change from spirals to words, and this is the main point of the film. The eye and the mind of the viewer perceive each geometric spiral as a whole; the circular movement imbues it with an illusion of depth, so that it seems either to protrude from the plane of the screen or to recede into it.

We respond to printed words quite differently. In order to read them, which entails the normal left to right scanning along a horizontal line, the eye tends to fix on a point and to allow the rotating words to pass by, left to right, into legibility. The optical illusion of depth generated by the graphic spirals corresponds to the "translation" of the letters into sound, words, and meaning in the act of reading. This correspondence is deliberately problematic. Both are interior reflexes to the optical stimuli of the film frames, but the route of their synthesis is particularly devious.

We must remember the status of the intertitle during the flourishing period of the silent cinema. It was a standard procedure to introduce each film episode with a title—almost a chapter heading—which would provide whatever information the director thought important in establishing the context, time, place, and emphasis of the scene to follow. The very rare efforts of such advanced directors as Lupu Pick, Kirsanoff, Murnau, and Vertov to eliminate intertitles merely testify to the fact that this dominant practice could become a conscious aesthetic problem. For Duchamp, as

well as for his surrealist associate Robert Desnos (who collaborated with Man Ray on *Étoile de Mer*), the discontinuity between word and image in a silent film because the focus of an examination of the essence of cinema. The fusion of picture and text in *Anémic Cinéma* is elaborately ironic.

In order to understand that fusion we must pay close attention to the barely translatable puns.[1] As they proceed one becomes aware of their strong sexual emphasis. The fifth and seventh are the most explicit: "Inceste ou passion de famille, à coups trop tirés" (Incest or family passion, with strokes too prolonged) and "Avez vous déjà mis la moëlle de l'épée dans le poële de l'aimée?" (Have you already put the marrow of the sword in the oven of the loved one?) The sexual allusions in these puns guide our reading of the others, both before and after, where allusions to defecation, breast-feeding, love bites, venereal disease, and orgasm occur.

Punning and internally rhyming language naturally refers to itself, closing off the world of the verbal disks into an autonomous entity. Two of the disks, the sixth and the ninth, thematically refer to their own linguistic gesture: "Esquivons les ecchymoses des esquimaux aux mots exquis" (Let us avoid the welts of esquimos with exquisite words). The *mots exquis* describe the very puns of the disks. The *ecchymoses* are inescapable once invoked by the puns; for a secondary (anemic) principle of association can inflect our perception of the graphic disks after reading the puns. Then the emerging and receding spirals come to look like the welts of the Eskimos' love bites, or the intercourse of the sword in the oven, or the breast the infant sucks. The final, ninth, disk declares the position of the author: "L'aspirant habite javel et moi j'avais l'habite en spirale" (The aspirant lives on Javel and I had the spiral costume). This is one of several French sentences in the film that are contaminated by English idiom. Javel is not only a Parisian avenue but part of a vulgar expression for semen. The author (moi) is both differentiated from and identical to the erotic aspirant, for he has an "inspired" habit of language, but he also has his penis (la bitte) in a spiral. This last possibility acknowledges that the sexualization of the graphic illusions is a complicated reflex in the mind of the viewer. By the demonstration of this film, then, cinema is anemic because of its erotic timidness and its endless but elusive chain of associations trapped between pictorial illusion and verbal allusion; while this particular film is anemic because of its self-imposed rejection of the space and time of human action, the conventional domain of filmic representation.

The intricacies and the paradoxes of the word and picture relationship that Duchamp embodied in *Anémic Cinéma* were dramatically reconsidered in several major films of the seventies.

George Landow's debt to Duchamp extends at least as far back as his *Film in which there appear sprocket holes, edge lettering, dirt particles, etc.*, a filmic variation of the Duchampian "ready-made" (the film-maker has spoken of it in these terms). Aside from titles, language did not enter Landow's film-making until *Institutional Quality*. Since then there has

been a progressive emphasis in his works on the independence of linguistic systems, which he underlined by puns, palindromes, and prayers within those films. By and large language has played a decisive role in the fundamental critique which all of his films of the seventies have marshalled: the examination of the status of filmic imagery.

The problematic of the "picture" elaborately structures *New Improved Institutional Quality: In the Environment of Liquids and Nasals a Parasitic Vowel Sometimes Develops*, about which the film-maker wrote:

> A reworking of an earlier film, INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY, in which the same test was given. In the earlier film the person taking the test was not seen, and the film viewer in effect became test taker. The newer version concerns itself with the effects of the test on the test taker. An attempt is made to escape from the oppressive environment of the test—a test containing meaningless, contradictory, and impossible-to-follow directions—by entering into the imagination. In this case it is specifically the imagination of the filmmaker, in which the test taker encounters images from previous Landow films: the blinking test pattern girl from FILM IN WHICH THERE APPEAR EDGE LETTERING, DIRT PARTICLES, SPROCKET HOLES, ETC., and the running alien from REMEDIAL READING COMPREHENSION (where the "alienated" filmmaker himself appeared). The test taker is "initiated" into this world by passing through a shoe (the shoe of "the woman who has dropped something") which has lost its normal spatial proportions, just as taking the test has caused the test taker to lose his sense of proportion. As he moves through the images in the filmmaker's mind, the test taker is in a trance like state, and is carried along by some unseen force. This is an allusion to the "trance film" and the "triumph of the imagination" described in P. Adams Sitney's *Visionary Film*. At the end of the film the test taker is back at his desk, still following directions. His "escape" was only temporary, and thus not a true escape at all.[2]

The first film that the 1976 *New Improved Institutional Quality* looks back upon is, of course, the *Institutional Quality* of 1968. In repeating most of the soundtrack of the first film, Landow shifts the "person," which had been a second-person address to the camera as viewer (with the insertion of the first-person hand as both the film-maker and the mediator of the viewer). Naturally the synecdoche of the hand leaves the respondent's age, sex, and characteristics unspecified. The tone of the questions, and the way they are repeated, suggest that the test is for a group of schoolchildren. There is comic irony, therefore, in seeing a man with gray hair look into the camera, as if at a teacher, and grimace as he tries to follow directions, at the beginning of the later film.

His responses at first resemble the earlier film: a large hand with a pen writes a number on the image of the television. But a dissolve readjusts the scale: the actor is suddenly in the actual room of the "picture" and he repeats his task by putting a number on the actual television. From this point until almost the end of the film, the man moves within the world of the "picture," numbering things, not their depictions, and, in general, looking quizzically back at the camera as he tries to take the figurative instructions literally.

In the first version, sitting on the television was a framed picture that was the object of an instruction. That it was a "picture" was all Landow showed; we could not make out the image within the frame. In the later film it is a color photograph of a woman, herself "framed" by a three-dimensional pattern of color bands. The image is a "facsimile" with some displacement of the single image of Landow's *Film in which there appear sprocket holes, edge lettering, dirt particles, etc.*, where a woman in a found bit of commercial color test-pattern blinks repeatedly in a loop. The examinee dutifully numbers this photograph (or pseudo-still) from the film-maker's earlier work.

The most striking sequence in *New Improved Institutional Quality* begins when the man tries to number the shoe of "the woman who dropped something." As he crawls toward her foot, the scale shifts once more. He is suddenly crawling within an enormous replica of her shoe. It seems to be about twelve feet long and seven high. As he examines the shoe a telephone rings and the instructor says, "Answer the telephone, answer the telephone, put a number 4 on what you would touch." This is the only correspondence between sound and instruction in the test; the telephone never enters the "picture." As the examinee tries to respond, he floats off as if in a trance, past two images from Landow films. The woman of the photograph, her image filling the whole screen, has come alive and blinks at the camera, and another actor, running in place, wears the sign "This is a film about you," which is a displaced facsimile from *Remedial Reading Comprehension*. He never reaches the telephone. The film ends with a shot of him at his desk as he was in the beginning.

The two facsimiles by which Landow chooses to represent his cinematic imagination are very interesting. In the case of the blinking woman, the image Landow used in *Film in which* was something he found, not something he made up or imagined. So here he re-imagines her twice. First, as a still photograph, a parody of a graduation portrait that might be found in the type of middle-class home represented in the "picture." Second, the mechanical illusion of loop printing, her blink, becomes a physical attribute. The jogging figure too is no longer an image born of the film laboratory when words were superimposed over an already doubled image. Like an obsessed preacher, he carries his sign. Landow offers a paradox of subjectivity: the film-maker is most himself, truest to his style, either when he finds his shot, or when he is denying his centrality to his own film. For in re-imagining the sequence from *Remedial Reading Com-*

prehension he has chosen to objectify the most ambiguous moment in his works.

As in several other Landow films there is a linguistic reference in the full title, *New Improved Institutional Quality: In the Environment of Liquids and Nasals a Parasitic Vowel Sometimes Develops*. Landow has said that this subtitle, which he found in a book on language, struck him because of the ambiguities of the words "liquids," "environment," and "parasitic." A perfect example of parasitic vowel formation is the pronunciation "filum" for "film." According to the theme of the film, in certain environments the imagination temporarily manifests itself. It is parasitic to the extent that it cannot invent images out of nothing, but shifts scale, takes the figurative literally, alters materials, condenses and displaces elements from its past experience.

The two earlier "autobiographies" of artistic incarnation, *Institutional Quality* and *Remedial Reading Comprehension*, postulated the moment of becoming a film-maker as the moment of recognizing the ontological instability of filmic representation. The converse moment would occur when the film-maker considers his images as if they had a life of their own: their status would be "improved." That is what momentarily happens in the version of 1976.

Landow emphasizes the temporary, and therefore illusionary, quality of the imaginative environment. In this respect, with characteristically ambiguous irony, he has some fun with the conclusion to the first edition of *Visionary Film*. The opposition of imagination and time is fundamental to Landow's criticism of cinematic imagery.

The films of artistic incarnation are all investigations of repetition. In *Institutional Quality* the very repetition of threading and projecting the film appears at almost the last moment to confound the pseudo-decisions about how to *start* to make films. The point of origin in *Remedial Reading Comprehension* is itself repeated and varied: a dream, a class, a film, an advertisement, the reading of a text. It is re-medial, and involved with a new origin and a new artist, to undo the patterns of aberration already inscribed in dreams, schools, films, advertisements, tests, and texts. *New Improved Institutional Quality* locates the moment of imagination in the momentary illusion that images are "things you would touch." This is not an eternal realm; and unlike some of his fellow avant-garde film-makers Landow does not seem to believe that the artist has a privileged relationship with God. The realm depicted here is parasitic, continually shifting and displacing images taken from all that has already been made, including art, even the art of the "same" film-maker.

For Landow the problematics of time in the context of filmic imagery are at odds with both the eschatology and the temporal/eternal distinction in his Christian films. *Wide Angle Saxon* (1976) provides the occasion for Landow to demonstrate, albeit ironically, his view of the status of cinematic imagery in a Christian vision that acknowledges a rational historical order, taking its meaning from the historical drama of Christ as the ful-

fillment of ancient prophecies and the definition of the future of time. The film obliquely describes the conversion of a television worker, Earl Greaves, who hears but rejects the proselytizing of a Messianic rock group in the course of his work only to be convinced by it, suddenly, while politely clapping for an avant-garde film that has bored him. Interspersed throughout this narrative are found (ready-made) mis-takes of a news item about the Panama Canal, culminating in the superimposition of the palindrome "A Man, A Plan, A Canal: Panama!," mental images apparently from the fictional Earl Greaves's dreams, and comments about the process by which this and other Landow films were made. A final shot puts the authority of the whole film in question: a woman awakes with a gasp and exclaims, "Oh, it was only a dream." (Landow considered making a series of films which would end with this line.)

Within the various episodes representing mental imagery, the Freudian principles of condensation and displacement are demonstrated. Landow incorporates free play between the linguistic and visual aspects of the film in this process. The palindromes and the repetitions of shots constitute an arbitrary, cyclic, and reversible order in contradistinction to which he posited the Christian revelation and the decisive moment of conversion. While the film mocks itself, its maker, and, in the hilarious preaching of a rock singer, its religious theme, it slyly invites the viewer to actualize the conversion attributed to its fictional protagonist. The Duchampian vertigo of word and image, he proposes, can only be surmounted by a more radical "imaginative" and "eternally present" leap into faith.

The boring avant-grade film which provides Earl Greaves with an opportunity to reflect on a biblical passage that sticks in his mind is incorporated, as a negative moment, within *Wide Angle Saxon*. Its title, "Regrettable Redding Condescension," is a parody of *Remedial Reading Comprehension*, but the film itself explicitly parodies Hollis Frampton's (*nostalgia*). The imaginary film-maker to whom Landow attributes the film-within-his film is Al Rutcurts, an anagram for "structural," a term I have used in this book to describe an aspect which Landow's work shares with several of his contemporaries, who, by the way, share his objections to generic association.[3]

Frampton's (*nostalgia*) is another autobiography of artistic incarnation; it retraces the artist's evolution from a still photographer to a film-maker. The film uses a series of systematic displacements between language and image, between flatness and depth, between stillness and motion. The most striking of these displacements is linguistic, which very obviously undermines the indexical unity of picture and sound. Such a unity was manifested in Jerome Hill's *Film Portrait* (1971), the first major work in this genre, every time he used the word "this." ("It would be nice if *this* would happen again," he tells us, and we take the "this" to refer unproblematically to what we see, say, the presentation of an award.) Frampton does not respect this form of unity. He shows us a still photograph and while we are looking at it, he tells us about the next one we will see. Yet

he does so without letting us in on the displacement. The present tense and the demonstrative pronouns are deliberately deceptive. In this way the correspondence between picture and description is postponed until the viewer makes the adjustment, which can be after several of the stills have gone by. This simple technique effectively unpacks the temporal category of the present in the film; the words anticipate the pictures, the pictures recall the words, so that as we look at the film we are induced to perform simultaneous acts: to imagine a photograph which would correspond to the description (and thereby to repeat again and again the recognition of the limitations of the pictorial imagination), to remember the earlier description and appreciate the irony with which it describes what we are seeing, and finally to experience, in the present, the disjunctive synchronicity.

But that is not all. The photographs rest, one at a time, on a hotplate. After some minutes the shape of the electric coils begins to burn its way through. The new, pristine photograph comes on only after the previous one has been reduced to a crisp. The metaphor of the consumption of memory turns into an ironic joke. Yet at the same time, without any visible cause, the still image has turned into a moving (burning) one; each time the fire comes as if from within the still. In this transformation we repeatedly recognize our disorientation; for we are looking *down* upon the horizontal hotplate although our tendency is to interpret the internal orientation of the photographic image as a vertical camera setup. Finally, the patently flat space of the still's surface, with its illusionary mapping of depth, turns into the shallow depth of the space between the hotplate and the camera, or at least the illusionary mapping of that depth on the flatness of the film screen.

The anticipatory descriptions leave one image unaccounted for: the first, of the darkroom itself; and one left to the imagination: the last, which is said to be so horrifying that it terminated the artist's will to be a still photographer. The temptation is set for us to interpret the film's time as circular. This temptation is even greater the first time one sees the film when the image of the darkroom has so faded in the memory that it is all the more susceptible to the paranoid rhetoric of the final description, which I will quote in full:

> Since 1966 I have made a few photographs. This has been partly through design, and partly through laziness. I think I expose fewer than fifty negatives a year now. Of course I work more deliberately than I once did, and that counts for something. But I must confess that I have largely given up still photography.
>
> So it is all the more surprising that I felt again, a few weeks ago, a vagrant urge that would have seemed familiar a few years ago: the urge to take my camera out of doors and make a photograph. It was a quite simple, obtrusive need. So I obeyed it.

> I wandered around for hours, unsatisfied, and finally turned towards home in the afternoon. Half a block from my front door, the receding perspective of an alley caught my eye . . . a dark tunnel with the cross-street beyond brightly lit. As I focussed and composed the image, a truck turned into the alley. The driver stopped it, got out, and walked away. He left his cab door open.
>
> My composition was spoiled, but I felt a perverse impulse to make the exposure anyway. I did so, and then went home to develop my single negative.
>
> When I came to print the negative, an odd thing struck my eye. *Something*, standing in the cross-street and invisible to me, was reflected in a factory window, and then reflected once more in the rear-view mirror attached to the truck door. It was only a tiny detail.
>
> Since then I have enlarged this small section of my negative enormously. The grain of the film all but obliterates the features of the image. It is obscure; by any possible reckoning, it is hopelessly ambiguous.
>
> Nevertheless, what I *believe* I see recorded, in that speck of film, fills me with such fear, such utter dread and loathing, that I think I shall never dare to make another photograph again.
>
> Here it is!
>
> Look at it!
>
> Do you see what I see?[4]

If the film describes a circle, then the horror is the terror of solipsism, of finding only the metonymies of one's origins in the accidents of exterior vision. This may only be a deliberate attempt to make us consider the seductions of the myth of cyclical time, and again be confounded. There is still another obscure option. The one thing one does see after the question, "Do you see what I see?" is the film-maker's monogram, the HF with which he signs his film. Yet this holds even less satisfaction than the circular form. The simple, unbearably ironic answer to the final question must be: "No. I do not see what you see." The narrator is no longer listening, of course. But that seems to be much of the point—the fruitlessness of the entire subjectivist quest, so complexly articulated by Brakhage, of establishing a correspondence, or even a calculus of the limits of a correspondence, between the film-maker's vision and his films. Frampton is having his cake and eating it too; but that indeed may be his definition of all autobiographical madness. The very wantonness of the pronoun "I" does not escape him. In "A Pentagram for Conjuring the Narrative," he wrote:

> "I" is the English familiar name by which an unspeakably intricate network of colloidal circuits—or, as some reason, the gar-

> rulous temporary inhabitant of the nexus—addresses itself; occasionally, etiquette permitting, it even calls itself that in public. How it came to be there (together with some odd bits of phantasmal rubbish) is a subject for virtually endless speculation: it is certainly alone; and in time it convinces itself, somewhat reluctantly, that it is waiting to die.[5]

In the film, Michael Snow reads the text Frampton wrote. The language of the various descriptions freely mixes a great number of deliberately veiled personal references to events unrelated to images on the screen, often of an erotic nature, with parodies of several kinds of art-historical discourse. There is a hilarious Panofskian interpretation of the religious iconography of two toilets. The formalistic language associated with the followers of Clement Greenberg is finely misappropriated for a found-object image of a forlorn planter among his flooded grapefruits. Vasarian biography, technical shoptalk, and art gossip have their chances as well. We are left, especially after the quasi-apocalyptic tone of the final text, with a thorough suspicion of the relationship of word to image, which corresponds apparently for Frampton with the moment of his incarnation as a film-maker.

The second description (and the third photograph) of (*nostalgia*) reflects the autobiographical paradox. The text promises a self-portrait of the artist at twenty-three years old and exults in the complete physical renewal of his cells since that time. There is considerable humor in hearing Snow delight in not being Frampton, or Frampton in not being himself, depending upon where one locates the narrative voice. If we believe this witty text there is hardly anything which connects either Snow *or* Frampton with the picture of the young man of a dozen years earlier.

In Landow's parody we see red paint poured over a hot plate as part of Rutcurts' "artistic" gesture of covering things arbitrarily with this color. When the paint begins to bubble we hear the voice of Michael Snow asking, "Do you see what I see?" Yet in the context of *Wide Angle Saxon* conviction through imagery is as superficial as Rutcurts's condescending art. There is, however, a technical, theological meaning to the word *condescension*: it is the act of God the Father manifesting himself among men as the Son. It is to this alternative sense that Greaves attends in the film.

(*nostalgia*) is the first of seven parts in Frampton's serial film *Hapax Legomena* (1971–1972). The title, a term from classical philology, refers to those words whose sense is ambiguous because they only occur once in surviving texts; their meaning can only be determined from context. Frampton has described the entire enterprise as a stereoscopic "superimposition of a personal myth of the history of one's art upon a factual account of one's own persona." The seven parts are not equally explicit about the artist's history, but they do each isolate a fundamental aspect of the ontology of cinema. Just as (*nostalgia*) concerns the limits of photography and its illusions, *Poetic Justice*, the most Duchampian of the series,

brings to the fore the concept of the film-script. The film must be read. On the screen remains a table with a small cactus and a cup of coffee to either side of a stack of papers. On the top paper we read sequentially the descriptions of two hundred and forty different shots, organized in four tableaux. At the end Frampton signs the work with an homage to Duchamp's "sculpture" of 1944, "Pocket Chess with Rubber Glove," by leaving a rubber glove on top of the now blank papers. Within the context of the film the glove not only represents the absence of the authorial hand; it suggests, as well, a gynecological instrument.

Between the blank page and the absent hand Frampton proposes a language, laden with indexical shifters (I, you, this), which illustrates the fragility (or anemia) of the cinematic experience. The hypnogogic phase of his verbal film alludes to the art of Brakhage. In an interview with Simon Field, Frampton acknowledged his debt to Brakhage but made the following distinction in their attitudes toward vision:

> Suppose I just propose a model that could *include both* of us, rather than one or the other of us, and suggest that Stan has been concentrating for a long time on a different segment of the seeing or perceiving process than I have been concentrating on. There's no question at all in my mind about the debt that I personally owe to Brakhage's work. . . . But I remember very, very clearly having in my still photographs felt that I was being forced into film . . . And one of the deciding things was a suspicion that there were, after all, some films that Stan Brakhage had not made. . . . Well, there was nevertheless something, not that he avoided, but that had not at that time centered his own preoccupations, and that still had to do with *seeing* certainly . . . you know, that *is* the core doctrine, seeing with the eye is still the centre of the whole thing. OK. But there is also seeing that is done very far back in the centres of the brain. There other seeing gets done, like those blind people who can touch things and tell you what color they are, and so forth. We're talking about a sense that's not a sense at all but a cluster of senses. . . . Well, what Brakhage did distinctly suggest, and I think not only to me, was that seeing as a kind of *total psycho*-chemical, or psycho-physical phenomenon, was a *continent*, and not just a pipe that things ran in through.[6]

Poetic Justice represents an extreme limit of "seeing that gets done very far back in the brain." It is also the farthest Frampton's cinema has moved from the aesthetic of Brakhage. In what had been publicly exhibited of Frampton's immense work-in-progress *Clouds of Magellan*—a composite film which he once estimated would run for twenty-four hours—the filmmaker seems to have been attempting to grapple with the stylistic and thematic priority of Brakhage's art.

Frampton succeeded Brakhage, however, as the principal voice of American avant-grade film theory. In his crucial essay, "A Pentagram for Conjuring the Narrative," he attempted a definition of the fundamental characteristics of cinema. It is worth nothing that he introduced his own theoretical pronouncement with a reflection on the title of Marcel Duchamp's final work, *Étant Donnés: 1 La chute d'eau, 2 Le gaz d'éclairage* (1946–66).

> Marcel Duchamp is speaking: "Given: 1. the waterfall; 2. the illuminating gas." (Who listens and understands?)
>
> A waterfall is not a "thing," nor is a flame of burning gas. Both are, rather, stable patterns of energy determining the boundaries of a characteristic sensible "shape" in space and time. The waterfall is present to consciousness only so long as water flows through it, and the flame, only so long as the gas continues to burn.
>
> You and I are semistable patterns of energy, maintaining in the very teeth of entropy a characteristic shape in space and time.
>
> What are the irreducible axioms of that part of thought we call the art of film?
>
> In other words, what stable patterns of energy limit the "shapes" generated, in space and in time, by all the celluloid that has ever cascaded through the projector's gate? Rigor demands that we admit only characteristics that are "totally redundant," that are to be found in "all" films.
>
> Two such inevitable conditions of film art come immediately to mind. The first is the visible limit of the projected image itself—the frame—which has taken on, through the accumulation of illusions that have transpired within its rectangular boundary, the force of a metaphor for consciousness itself. The frame, dimensionless as a figure in Euclid's "Elements," partitions what is present to contemplation from what is absolutely elsewhere.
>
> The second inevitable condition of film art is the plausibility of the photographic illusion. I do not refer to what is called "representation," since the photographic record proves to be, on examination, an extreme abstraction from its pretext, arbitrarily mapping values from a long sensory spectrum on a nominal surface. I mean simply that the mind, by a kind of automatic reflex, invariably triangulates a precise "distance" between the im-

> age it sees projected and a "norm" held in the imagination. (This process depends from an ontogenetic assumption peculiar to photographic images, namely that every photograph implies a "real" concrete phenomenon (and "vice versa!"); since it is instantaneous and effortless, it must be "learned.")
>
> Recently, in conversation, Stan Brakhage (putting on, if you insist, the mask of an "advocatus diaboli") proposed for film a third axiom, or inevitable condition: narrative.[7]

Hapax Legomena is a demonstration of these principles. The status of the photograph and the status of narrative are "issues" in the first two films of the series. The seventh or final segment, *Special Effects*, simply shows the filmic frame, depicted by a broken white line around a black rectangular void. Frampton filmed this static graphic design with a hand-held telephoto lens from a distance so that the nervous jittering of his body, as a ground or base for the camera, would be recorded simultaneously with the universal outline of the frame.

One might further note that the last segment he filmed for *Hapax Legomena*, even though it is sixth in the order of screening, was originally to have the Duchampian title *Given:*. . . . before he settled on *Remote Control*. This part and *Travelling Matte* are complementary meditations on the relationship of video to film: one from the point of view of a static observer, reconstructing the narrative of television shows through single-frame montage; the other stressing the moving body of the artist as he makes one long continuous take in which he masks the image with his hand.

The most comprehensive, and the most impressive, of the serial films of the seventies was Michael Snow's *Rameau's Nephew by Diderot (Thanx to Dennis Young) by Wilma Schoen* (1974), a 285-minute-long "encyclopaedia" of sound and image interaction, with numerous debts to the work of Duchamp. Passages of pure color alternation punctuate the twenty-four loosely interwoven episodes (Frampton was also fond of multiples of twenty-four; he called it cinema's "magic number") which are followed by an erratum and an addendum. The episodes are so varied in their different approaches to the possibilities of sound and picture fusion that the film challenges both description and analysis. Its maze-like system of internal cross-references and its disguised allusions to the contents and forms of Snow's earlier films would require considerably more space just to be noted comprehensively than a survey chapter can allot.

Whereas the three earlier long films upon which Snow's eminence as a film-maker rests—*Wavelength*, ↔, and *La Région Centrale*—propose modes of camera movement as models of cognition, *Rameau's Nephew* . . . lacks a single defining gesture of the camera; it explores the whole human body as a field of epistemological inquiry. Speaking, focusing, singing, urinating, laughing, reading, whistling, flatulating, eating, hand tap-

ping, and fornicating are chief among the types of bodily activity and noise heard and discussed in the film. The actual sounds are often rendered in a deliberately unnaturalistic manner through a series of self-conscious acts of recording and editing: proximity to the microphone, modulation during a take, superimposition of sounds, and substitution in editing. This rendering of sonic perspective, which is analogous to the camera movements of the earlier films, retards the immediate assimilation of the sounds as language or as natural background; thus the range of difficulty of recognition from raw noise to articulate speech (and music) enters as a thematic element in the film. The whole rambling film seems organized around a dizzying nexus of polarities which include picture/sound, script/performance, direction/acting, writing/speaking, and above all word/thing. The film opens with an image of the film-maker whistling into a microphone and ends with a brief shot of a snowdrift, so that the work is bracketed by a rebus for Mike . . . Snow. The elaborately twisting movement across episodes, inspired in part by Diderot's eccentric dialogical novel, passes freely from one aspect of human sound-making to another, with the speech organs at one pole and written words at the other.

Early on, Snow has someone read a text on the power of language to shape our concept of reality; this he filmed on color videotape. The reader re-divides the letters of the text so that the new phonic combinations are barely intelligible (emphasizing the fragility of the written alphabet). Furthermore the electronic color pattern of the videotape erratically responds to the pitch or stress of his alexical words. Even the titles of the film provide the occasion for grotesquely enlarging the already immense cast by the insertion of a long series of anagrams for Michael Snow: Wilma Schoen, Naomi S. Welch, El Masochism, Noel W. I. Chasm, Lemon Coca Wish, Male Cow Shin, Nice Slow Ham, Malice Shown, etc., etc. He even invents a purely cinematic palindrome near the middle of the film by having a group of actors read the words of their script backward (e.g. "?Nushiv fuh trawf uth sith si"), and then, after showing the episode as it was shot, he prints it in reverse so that their conversation about flatuence approaches the threshold of conprehensibility. The example I quoted becomes a crude joke on Brakhage: "Is this the fart of vision?"

The epistemological dimensions of the film become more thematically explicit at its conclusion. A long episode in a hotel involves numerous allusions to the film we are watching ("This film looks like [pause] it was hewn with an axe." "How can you say that [pause] if you're in it?") and its modes of construction (after musical notes are synchronized with a moving mouth someone observes, "I didn't know you spoke trumpet"). The cliché "seeing is believing" generates a long series of variations beginning with "hearing is deceiving." The inquiry into the conditions of empirical certainty, which this casual conversation initiates, climaxes in a hilarious debate about the reality of a table, a parody of Plato's theory of forms in the *Republic*. After one character angrily demolishes it with an axe to prove his point, its purely verbal existence is momentarily asserted.

Michael Snow (left) in his *Rameau's Nephew by Diderot (Thanx to Dennis Young) by Wilma Schoen*.

"Maybe it's a multiplication table." "If it is a vegetable we can prove that 'eating is believing' which is what *I* believe." Then Snow brilliantly manifests the table again in superimposition, so that, even though we can "see" it, it cannot support the cups and saucers the actors try to place on it. Here the very insufficiency of film, as a representational system, to *prove* anything about the nature of representation, becomes the object of a demonstration. The debate shifts from metaphysical certainty to eroticism with equally comic and paradoxical dramatizations of the gulf between cinema and experience. In the final scene, before the addendum, Snow underlines the discrepancies between names and things which he had been enumerating in his film. Sitting at a table, he shows us three objects. For a pair of finger cymbals he makes the sound which can be written either "cymbal" or "symbol." Holding up an orange, he says "orange"; then, finally, presenting a banana, he says "yellow." This short episode intends to catch the viewer off guard and it illustrates his dependence on a simplified concept of language in which there is an adequation of things and names. Snow saves one interpretive ambiguity, worthy of Duchamp's heritage, for the addendum, which is a dedication to Dennis Young who first suggested to the film-maker that he read Diderot as source-material for a new film. Elevator doors open and the dedicatee sticks out his tongue. An exhibition of the organ of speech or a message to the viewer? Both, of course. The presentation of the source of articulation coincides with a fully articulated gesture.

Within *Rameau's Nephew . . .*, Michael Snow is a name, a configuration of letters, a rebus, an offscreen (directing) voice, and an image or visible body. Language, in the wide sense projected by the film, is the matrix of forces requiring us to see the signs as substitutions for things before the mystery of what a thing *is* can even become an issue. This stress on the prestructuring of language, on its priority to perception, accounts for the cinematic style of the film. It is particularly interesting that Snow, in forgoing his accustomed strategy of making the camera the center of cognition, and by coolly observing the body as the locus of information (even for himself, for there is no transcendental perspective reserved for the film-maker here), created a form which allows language to control an and organize his film: for long stretches the montage responds to shifts of syllable, word, phrase, sentence, or speaker. The underlying authority posited by the film resides neither in the filmic syntax nor in the body as the object of observation, but in the ambivalent interpretive contract between the two. Music represents the upper limit of this contract, the obscene gesture (sticking out the tongue, for instance) the lower; between them mediates the self-referentiality of speech, as in the riddles Snow repeats through his actors: "Why is black music so popular?" "Because you can't see white music on the page"; or "Why does a hummingbird hum?" "Because it doesn't know the words."

The choreographer, Yvonne Rainer, began her film-making by exploring the parameters of narrative language in her three long films, *Lives of*

Performers (1972), *Film about a Woman Who . . .* (1974), and *Kristina Talking Pictures* (1976). She has described the first of them in the following note:

> *Lives of Performers*, the 16mm film I directed in the Spring of 1972 (Cinematographer—Babette Mangolte), unfolds in roughly fourteen episodes, each having a different cinematic approach toward integrating real and fictional aspects of my roles of director and choreographer and the performers' real and fictional roles during the making of previous work and the film itself. The first section (and a later one) is edited footage of an actual rehearsal of *Walk, She Said* for a live performance (*Performance* at the Whitney Museum). The second shows photographs of *Grand Union Dreams* while the voice-over narration describes the content of the photos and the changing intimacies of these same performers—fictional in this instance. In other sections the narrative zigzags along as the performers talk and move about in a barren studio setting containing a couch and several chairs. A simultaneous voice-over commentary by the performers themselves—sometimes read, sometimes improvised from the scenario—alternating with inter-titles, constantly interprets the enigmatic sequences of unheard (seen) discussion and implied emotional complexities. The narration is further complicated by the fact that part of it was recorded during an actual performance, so that the laughter of the then-present audience is heard at various times. Valda Setterfield performs a solo dance at one point (which I had originally choreographed for *Grand Union Dreams*). It *is* not very well appreciated by Fernando Torm, her (presumed) lover. ("He has seen it a hundred times.")
>
> The film ends with a "real performance," a series of imitations of stills from G. W. Pabst's *Pandora's Box or Lulu*. The other performers are John Erdman, Shirley Soffer, Epp Kotkas, James Barth, Sarah Soffer, and myself as director.[9]

In the extraordinary series of dance concerts Rainer created and performed throughout the 1960s she often incorporated narrative texts, allusions to famous films, and even film clips. Her cinematic style originates with a network of gestures locating herself in intersecting traditions of cinema, fiction, and performance. In her first two films the fluid, sinuous and utterly distinctive camerawork of Babette Mangolte, who shot much of *Rameau's Nephew . . .*, heightens the severe withdrawal from the conventions of fictional representation in the visual dimensions of her work. In *Film about a Woman Who . . .* the optical reconstruction of a psychological scenario is accompanied by a dispassionately delivered commentary in several voices which portrays the histories, memories, thoughts, and

fears of the utterly unrealistic characters we see on the screen. The paradigmatic tension of text and image is visualized when Rainer's face appears with paragraphs of printed prose stuck on her cheeks and forehead. Variations on this gesture occur in the form of silent title cards and superimposed subtitles throughout the film.

Brakhage was responding to Frampton's *Zorns Lemma* when he made *The Riddle of Lumen* (1972), but he could equally have addressed his note on the film to the recent work of Landow or Snow. He wrote:

> The classical riddle was meant to be heard, of course, its answers are contained within its questions; and on the smallest piece of itself this possibility depends upon SOUND—"utterly," like they say . . . the pun its pivot. Therefore, THE RIDDLE OF LUMEN depends upon qualities of LIGHT. All films do, of course. But with THE RIDDLE OF LUMEN, "the hero" of the film is light/itself. It is a film I'd long wanted to make—inspired by the sense, and specific formal possibilities, of the classical Eng. lang. riddle . . . only one appropriate to film, and thus, as distinct from language as I could make it.[10]

The Riddle of Lumen presents an evenly paced sequence of images, which seem to follow an elusive logic. As in *Zorns Lemma* the viewer is called upon to recognize or invent a principle of association linking each shot with its predecessor. However, here the connection is nonverbal. A similarity, or an antithesis, of color, shape, saturation, movement, composition, or depth links one shot to another. A telling negative moment occurs in the film when we see a child studying a didactic reader in which simply represented objects are coupled with their monosyllabic names in alphabetical order.

Brakhage released more than fifty films in the seventies. Although the anxieties about the natural world which had generated so many of his early masterpieces seem to have diminished in the later films, the horrors of solipsism continue to plague him. In fact, several quasi-documentary films from this period—*eyes* (1970), *Deus ex* (1971), more problematically *The Act of Seeing with One's Own Eyes* (1971), and *The Governor* (1977)—constitute attempts to ground his perception in a firmly established exterior reality (the police, a hospital, a morgue, the official life of a politician) as a brake to his excessive and frightening tendency to interiorize all that he sees. However, they are far less significant than his prolonged autobiographical enterprise "The Book of the Film" or his tour-de-force *The Text of Light* (1974).

For years he had been haunted by an empty boast made during his adolescence that he could shoot a feature film in a wastepaper basket. He finally satisfied himself by making *The Text of Light* in (through) a large crystal ashtray. This magnificent film—a slow montage of iridescent splays of light and shifting landscapes of sheer color, which acknowledges debts

to Turner and American Romantic landscape painters as well as to James Davis, the pioneer film-maker of light projections—is the culmination of Brakhage's exploration of anamorphosis. *The Text of Light* never explicitly presents the ashtray as an object; it is instead an extension of the lens, and a considerable amount of the film's power derives from the recognition that it is a film created within the optics of the lens itself and its crystal extension. In blanking out the spatial configurations of the natural world, which he does more dramatically in this film than in any earlier work, Brakhage projects, in response, an optical nature that is fully his own.

Scenes from Under Childhood (1967–1970), a four-part film, is itself the first chapter of a projected giant work, "The Book of the Film." Another chapter in three parts, *The Weir-Falcon Saga*, has also been completed. When Brakhage calls this work "an autobiography in the Proustian sense," he means that the film makes no claims to represent the facts of his life; instead it reproduces the structures of his experience as he remembers them. The distinction Brakhage makes is between classical autobiography and the autobiographical novel. A more useful distinction can be drawn within the strict autobiographical tradition: Augustine in his *Confessions* presents himself as a *typical* man, in all else but the very fact that he writes. Rousseau, in his *Confessions*, portrays the *extraordinary* individual, an absolutely unique case. Brakhage has operated in both autobiographical modes. *Scenes from Under Childhood* and *The Weir-Falcon Saga* participate in the Augustinian manner. Their "fictional" principle is that the film-maker allows his observation of the events of his children's lives to stand for his own life. But insofar as this substitution is overtly declared as such, and the distance between the film-maker and the children is inscribed in the structure of the films, the fiction dissolves. In its place there emerges the suggestion that the activities of children can reveal a universal model for psycho-history. Brakhage's Rousseauistic confession, *Sincerity* (reel one) describes the events leading from his own childhood to the making of his first film.

The opening section of *Scenes* describes two contradictory movements: on the one hand we witness the emergence of consciousness from a red "pre-natal" field. Images of the child gradually come into focus; perspectives eventually stabilize into the synthetic unity of objects. Much of the film is a prolonged and wonderfully precise dramatization of the origins of sense certainty, something that Jerome Hill rapidly described in a recollection of his bedside clock but did not illustrate in *Film Portrait*. On the other hand, the forward movement of the film can be understood as the quest of memory: out of the red haze of the autobiographer's closed eyes, memories come to the fore and slip away. The entire section, then, describes the difficult attempt to establish a cinematic transcription of memory.

In *Scenes*, and even more explicitly in *Sincerity*, Brakhage uses the photograph album as the external scaffolding of memory. In one way the film represents the impossible effort of the autobiographer to evoke mem-

ories from the photographs he finds in the snapshot albums of his and his wife's childhood. The simultaneity of these several lines of development (the birth of consciousness, the will to remember, the reading of the album) determines the film's skepticism. For Brakhage any genealogy of the mind must be a fiction; the autobiographer interprets the sequence of his coming to remember as the sequence of his life; and even that ordering needs the support of a conventional model, the snapshot album.

For the most part, the second section of the film explores the nature of play and imitation among the Brakhage children and introduces an analysis of their affections. An opening montage of rhythmic physical games, such as swinging and whirling, is soon superseded by a cluster of shots of the different children, at widely different ages, crying. Throughout this part the montage is exceptionally fluid, with the superimposition of phosphene imagery reinforcing the elisions. These impart to the thematic components (games, toys, imitation, emotions, and the parents' sexuality) a sense of interlocking association. He cuts in an image from the photograph album only once here: the image of a boy, perhaps Brakhage himself, on a bicycle appears over the children riding their various vehicles. Perhaps more significantly there is a shot of Jane looking through the album itself in a context that suggests that even her nostalgic attraction to these past images constitutes a form-of, or an outgrowth of, play.

In the broad movement of the section there is a shift from physical-rhythmic games (the swing) to the use of vehicles and ultimately to mimetic toys. A transition that links images of a primal scene of the parents' intercourse to the toys occurs when shots of the mother's nude body and of the father urinating precede the image of an unclothed doll. Dollhouse play follows, and even the dressing of one doll in a wedding gown.

However, the crucial moment in the analysis of mimesis takes place earlier in the section. Brakhage establishes a metaphor for cinema, its framing process and illusory depth and movement, by superimposing very quickly several shots of a large window, filmed at varying distances. The frame rapidly contracts and expands, recedes and emerges, as the short views of the same "thing" are manipulated. This self-conscious figure of a film within the film is immediately followed by a clip from a televised Shirley Temple movie. The antithesis of the myth of happy childhood and the cinematic analysis of children could not be more bluntly articulated. Brakhage also shows us the enthralled and nervous expressions of his children as they watch the movie on the TV screen. He wants to underline the way in which mimetic representations of childhood help to form the children's affective patterns and inculcate the mythology of childhood in them. The closing of this mimetic circuit is an important moment in *Scenes*, and reflects *its* circularity, which is indeed the basic circularity of serious autobiographical enterprises.

Many of Brakhage's earlier films, and especially *Dog Star Man*, were eschatologically structured, moving from a pristine moment of origin to a totalizing end. All of his autobiographical works deny this eschatology,

and, as I shall try to show, the theory of metaphor that attends it. In his autobiographical reflections, there can be no true beginning, no immanent structure, no totalizing end. As an autobiographer, he discovers that even his memory has been influenced by the scrapbook his mother structured, his emotional patterns trained by movies that pass on absurd myths of childhood.

In the fourth and final section of the film, this repetitive, circular genealogy of the psyche is re-articulated from a different perspective. Brakhage may be taking the liberty Gertrude Stein, one of his central sources, took when she wrote *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and *Everybody's Autobiography*: for this part is centered on Jane. As she cries, apparently in prolonged grief, photographs of her mother and of herself as a child appear. These in turn are superimposed over her daughters. For the first time in the film a continuity is suggested in which the children repeat the patterns which they learned from their parents, while the parents can see their own patterns only as reflected in the children. Early in the film a cheerful snapshot of two children, presumably Jane and her brother, is superimposed over a fight among her children. Much later in the film her eldest daughter is isolated in tears, corresponding to the opening grief of the mother.

Near the end of the film we can catch the reflection of Brakhage filming the eyes of Jane and the children, his "eye" being the mechanical viewfinder with its three lens sights. After this, he makes a disturbing appearance. Obviously in a foul humor he growls, "I'm hungry" (the phrase is easily read from his lips) and angrily shakes his finger at the camera. At the end of a sequence in which adolescent boys fly a remote-control model airplane, one of the boys twice describes the arc of the plane's flight with a graceful arm and wrist gesture. Brakhage's finger and the boy's arm rhyme at the point in the film (the end) where Brakhage's aggression is associated with a montage of youthful sports events. These events, intercut with a photograph of some institution, possibly a high school, represent a stage at which gesture and play become social aggregates.

The Animals of Eden and After (1970) portrays the process of convalescence as a normalization or accommodation to socially dictated patterns of perception and thought. According to the implicit scheme of the three films of *The Weir-Falcon Saga*, fever and illness so jar the perceptual patterns that a re-experiencing and a re-mythologizing of the world have to occur. The first part of the film is a metonymic series of shots of Brakhage's home, interior and exterior, apparently from the point of view of the child. The surrounding landscape during different seasons, details of furniture, hearth-fire, children playing, and above all the numerous animals of the ménage (goats, birds, dogs, an ass) appear in a montage of wanton lushness. The motive for joining one shot to another is primarily optical as in *The Riddle of Lumen*, not conceptual; something in the texture, color, saturation, or rhythm of one shot calls for a complement in the next. Among the most characteristic images of this first part is one of

the mother sunbathing, with a child at one side and a goat at the other. For Brakhage this metonymic sensual vision represents Edenic consciousness. He recognizes it not as an aboriginal state but as a moment situated between the fevered aberrations of intense illness and the conceptual and socially determined vision of the fully "recovered" child.

The turning point of the film follows the birth of a goat. Brakhage cuts from the color image of the animal's labor to a black and white image of a crying baby. The shift in film stocks emphasizes the decisiveness of this moment. In the narrative of the film, this is the point at which the child, witnessing the birth of the animal, imagines his own birth. Since animals are so born, he must once have been. The actual birth is of course not within his conscious memory. Thus metaphor enters the scheme. It is an act of interpretation which brings the self of the observer into a regulatory relationship with what he sees. Metaphor is an act of identification, yet the act is predicated upon the difference of the elements which are to be equated. Every metaphor postulates a coherence where it first recognizes a disparity.

The child in Brakhage's film takes the newborn goat as a type for his own invisible past; through metaphor he enters into the first and simplest autobiographical reflection; for it is with the introduction of this metaphoric montage that a linear operation of time enters the film. His recovery begins. He can play outside. There we see him recapitulating the primitive history of the species. He points his toy rifle at the dog, miming the primeval hunter. Mime itself is a further aspect of metaphor. At the moment when the child realizes he is *like* the goat, he realizes he is not precisely the same. Through metaphor he invents himself as human and reduces goats, dogs, etc. to the role of "animals." Then they can be hunted, domesticated, even bottle-fed with a metaphoric rubber nipple.

The subsequent development of the film traces the amplifications of metaphor through play. With the initial recognition of the difference between animals and men comes a large increase in human power and authority, culminating in the eating of the animals who were bred and raised for that purpose. At the same time the animals are seen to have something that is lacking in man. To recover this loss the human resorts to sympathetic magic. We now see the child wearing various halloween masks and aping animal gestures. Shortly afterwards the canary we saw before in close-up, reappears, now clearly imprisoned in a cage. Two different metaphoric developments of the bird follow. First, continuing the postulate of the film-maker that the games of children recapitulate the origins of human religion, the canary is followed by the image of the child wearing a dime-store "Indian" headdress, which reminds us that these feathered chapelets gave their wearers the attributes of birds. Another sequence intercuts the caged bird with the crying child. Here is an elaboration of the initial man/animal comparison. The trapped bird now stands for the feelings of the weeping child. Metaphor comes to be the exterior representation of an invisible interiority. (In the portrait of his daughter Crystal in 15 *Song*

Traits Brakhage earlier explored the cliché of representing a child's sadness by a caged bird.)

The curtain of a stage and the edge of an American flag appear in the penultimate montage. The very fragmentation, the effectiveness of synecdoche at this point, is a formal demonstration of the triumph of conceptual montage. The curtain alludes to the prehistorical transition from sympathetic magic to religious, ritual theatre. The flag is the incarnation of the inflated symbol. Since the landscapes of the film represent the immediate environs of the Brakhage house in all the seasons, the vision of home is determined by the horizon. The idea of a nation is a succession of horizons, which can only be symbolically or metaphorically represented. The flag is the nation, visually. It is the largest and the most powerful of the film's metaphorical movements away from the immediate and the optical.

All three films in *The Weir-Falcon Saga* end with a shot of the moon. In *The Animals of Eden and After*, that shot is immediately preceded by a shot of a Christmas-like decoration, a gilded tinsel in the shape of a five-pointed star. Here the difference between the popularized and secularized vestige of a religious ornament and a visible heavenly body (of which the ornament is an abstracted, formalized representation) is cumulatively illustrated. Not only is the difference perceptual; it is also historical, for the ornament not only represents a star, but also Christmas and the more ancient fertility festivals of which it is a survival.

Brakhage's point is that we are always surrounded by a world of metaphors, overlaid like a palimpsest, conventionalized traces of once powerful perceptions, which induce us to see the world as reflections of ourselves. The child of his film, and the film-maker himself, for whom the son stands as an autobiographical metaphor, were born into and are part of such a world of symbolical meanings. His illness created a temporary disengagement from this world of symbolical meanings. His readjustment to the normal world takes the form of a myth of creation (*The Machine of Eden*, [1970]) followed by a myth of evolution. The key word in the title of the last film was "After." Eden comes into existence only *after* it disappears. Any version of innocence is a negative metaphor, something *unlike* the present.

If *The Animals of Eden and After* explores the fact of cinematic succession as a model for autobiography, *Sincerity (reel one)* (1973) treats the autobiographical moment in terms of the encounter of camera and object. Just as the *aftering* of frames and shots is an *a priori* condition of all films, the stare of the camera at something is not the only, but certainly the overwhelmingly dominant, way of producing images on those frames. The theme of *Sincerity* (*reel one*) is Brakhage's incarnation as an artist. Here he quests impossibly to represent the moment he became a film-maker. The time-span runs from his birth to the making of his first film, *Interim*.

The grandmother's eyes and the mother's face are the first images in *Sincerity*. The entire film might be seen as an elaboration on that moment, as if all that occurs, between the opening encounter of the camera with an

old photograph and the final scene of the mature Brakhage staring into the camera, takes place during the moment of the film-maker's meditation on the static image of his mother.

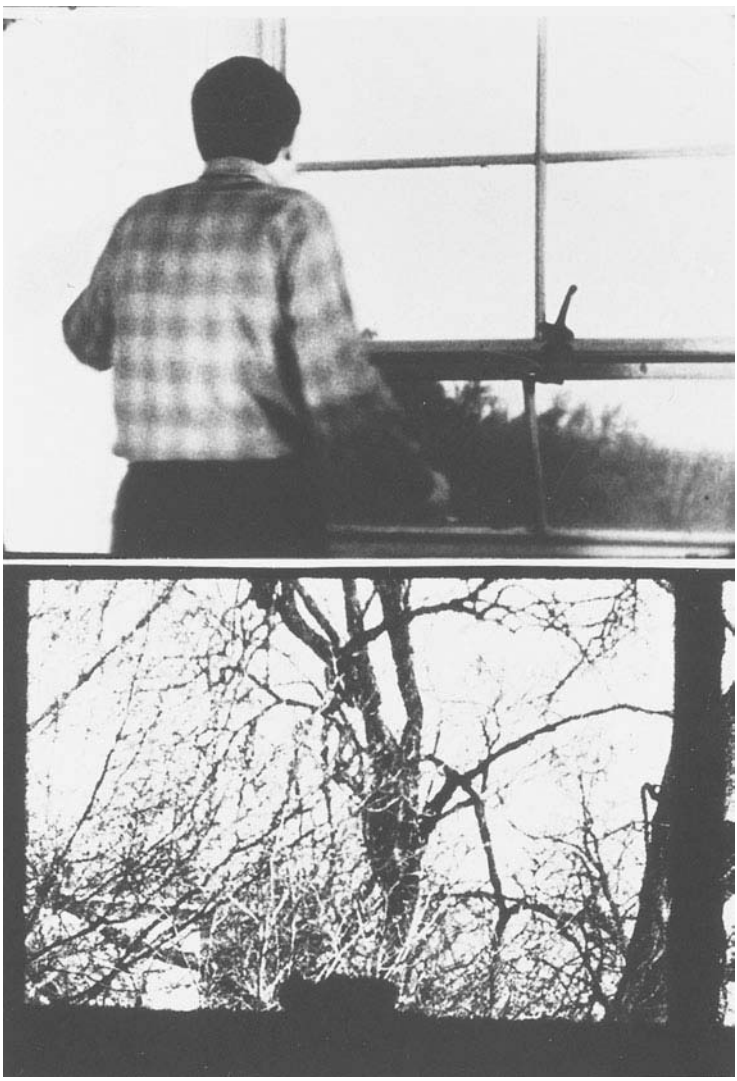
The photograph album is central to *Sincerity*. The film's opening shots follow a pattern. The camera shifts from the young Brakhage in the pictures to some detail, for example, a trellis, part of a roof, in the background. Then in color, and with a moving camera, the film-maker seeks out that site today. The autobiographical dilemma of this film is the failure of a site to recover the plenitude of past experience. This is why so much of the film is a study of the campus of Dartmouth College, where he went for a semester before he quit while "faking" a nervous breakdown. Quitting college coincided with the decision to make films.

Isolated images which had been used metaphorically earlier in the film, such as some broken glass or a distorted reflecting surface, are encountered in the college episode as metonymic details of the environment. This strategy diffuses the earlier metaphors and puts into question the temporal organization of the whole film. However, the crucial metaphoric substitution is of a different order in this film from the comparable moment in *The Animals of Eden and After*. Brakhage is filming the view from the window of a college room when the scene cuts to himself in an expressionistic avant-garde film of the 1950s. He throws a cup of water against the wall of his room and, in frustration, moves to the window. This sequence is matched with the position of the window in the color sequence of the college. Here the implication is that the emotional tone which he cannot recover at present-day Dartmouth is preserved in the "fictional" film in which he acted soon after leaving the college.

After this turn, the film shifts to the site of his own first film, *Interim*. Fortunately for *Sincerity*, Stan Phillips, Brakhage's cameraman for that initial venture, would take shots of the crew with the bits of film left near the ends of the reels. The young Brakhage seems to have deplored this playfulness; for he appears ordering the cameraman to stop. In any case, one has, for the moment of making *Interim*, what was lacking in the other moments of the autobiography, a filmic record. At least apparently so.

It is remarkable that none of the crew, nor the actors when they are not performing, can stand the gaze of the camera. They clown, grimace, turn away, blush, or order the shot stopped. The entire film, *Sincerity*, is directed toward this scene of recovered representation, which itself turns out to be camera shy.

Among the production clips from *Interim* is a long shot of the protagonist's eyes. Brakhage quickly intercuts that youthful stare with his own eyes. The alternating montage creates an impossible mutual stare over more than twenty years. Of course, the displacement is not only temporal. Any encounter represented by the intercutting of two sets of eyes or two faces in cinema is mediated by the unseen presence of the camera. In this case, the actor looked into a camera in 1953 and Brakhage looked into



Stan Brakhage's *Sincerity (reel one)*. Two sequential images: Brakhage from Larry Jordan's 1956 psychodrama, *The One Romantic Venture of Edward* (black and white), fused to a view of the Dartmouth campus from a window (color).

one sometime in the 1970s. The alternating montage fictionally erased the presence of the camera and aligned the eyes. This substitution of another image for the presence of the camera is as important in defining the cinematic limitation of autobiography as is the more dramatic and obvious trope of the stare across time. For the one demarcation here of the present is the presence of the camera, but that present is always a past, or an absent, moment at the time of editing. The alternations of montage are tropes to recover the presence of the moment of filming. Again the encounter of self with self as dramatized in *Sincerity* becomes a study of the artificial temporality of all cinema. The moment of artistic incarnation is represented not as a moment within the film, but in a recognition of the status of cinema as demonstrated by the form of the film.

James Broughton's *Testament* (1974) is the purest and to my mind the most powerful of the film autobiographies of the seventies. In style and in technique it is quite eclectic; its most moving sequence comes right out of Hill's *Film Portrait*, a sequence of photographs in reverse chronological order. Yet an extreme and profound transformation of the strategies of autobiography is the result of Broughton's art.

The opening trope brings together an allusion to Maya Deren (the reversed sea from *At Land*), who was one of the major inspirations of Broughton's early cinema, and a recollection of "the aging balletomane" (the rocking chair), the icon of retrospective fancy in Broughton's *Four in the Afternoon*. In this shot, the film-maker himself sits in a rocking chair on a beach. His rocking movement indicates a sympathetic union with the sea he contemplates. This image, with its several variations, including one using reverse photography (where Broughton walks backward out of the backward-rolling waves to reoccupy the empty chair), presents the constitutive moment of the film: everything occurs as if recalled from this extended rhythmic figure. The empty chair is one of the strong substitutions for the moment of death in *Testament*. When the film-maker comes back into it, he acknowledges the *ad hoc* cinematic illusion of autobiographical continuity. This metaphorical use of reverse motion also occured in *Film Portrait*. Broughton's choice of imagery, his superb timing, and the quality of the verbal text which accompanies the images raise this figure to a power unanticipated by the self-irony of Hill's film.

The other intimation of death, juxtaposed in the editing with the sequence of the empty chair, is the montage of photographs to which I referred. There are several interludes of still photographs, showing Broughton's parents, his collaborators on the sets of his various films, and his home life. The most dramatic, however, occurs at the end of a processional march, in which the poet, in an elaborate feathered costume, is carried on a litter through the streets of Modesto, California, his birthplace, on a day when he was publicly honored by the town's library. Parading with him, under the banner "In memory of James Broughton," are many of his students costumed as totemic animals. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of this procession is the inclusion of the faces of the puzzled and amused

bystanders. Where Hill told of his family, "These people to whom I belonged, did not belong to me," Broughton vividly demonstrates the isolation and the strangeness of his poetic vocation in this marvelous parade. The procession brings him to a graveyard. A shot of his fascinating, wrinkled face dissolves into the sequence of photographs in anti-chronological order. As the images rush toward infancy one sees the unmasking of the mature features as a movement towards an essence. It is as if after the earliest picture we should expect some image of primal nonexistence. Instead the montage cuts powerfully from the baby's face to a still image of the aged poet under a weblike veil, which emphasizes both the lines of his face and the birdlike nature of his costume. In his text for the presentation of the Twelfth Independent Film Award, Ken Kelman described *Testament* as "a ritual mask with sardonic bite which opens to giddy depths and lets out the roar of good old animal spirits."[11] The whole processional sequence is the giddiest of those depths and one of the sublime moments of the cinema of the seventies.

The text of the film is an anthology of passages from *A Long Undressing*, Broughton's collected poems, carefully excerpted and intoned as if they constituted a single autobiographical poem. Early in the film when a voice (presumably that of one of the townspeople watching the procession which is seen much later) asks, "Who is James Broughton?", the citation is in fact from the poem "I Am a Medium," the autobiographical forward to the collection:

> I am a third generation Californian . . .
> My grandfathers were bankers, and so was my father.
> But my mother wanted me to become a surgeon.
> However, one night when I was 3 years old
> I was awakened by a glittering stranger
> who told me I was a poet and always would be
> and never to fear being alone or being laughed at.
> That was my first meeting with my angel
> who is the most interesting poet I have ever met.

The indifference to being alone or being laughed at is illustrated by the outrageous procession through Modesto, later in the film. But the moment of poetic incarnation is illustrated at this point by the dance of a nearly naked youth, in silver body-paint, with a long goatlike phallus, which he rubs against an immense egg, representing the poet. A motherly figure hovers over it too. Even Christ makes a brief appearance, to bless it.

The issue of artistic incarnation is fundamentally different in *Testament* from the variations we have observed in other film-makers. There is no question of psychological development, dramatic reorientation, or the patterning of aberrant responses. The story that Broughton tells us is of a calling, pure and simple. Perhaps not so simple. For it is a fusion of erotic and religious origins. The mythic representation of the angel poet, as well

as of the Great Mother and Christ in this Orphic trinity, looks forward to another scene of incarnation, as a film-maker *per se*, a little later in the film. But before we can come to that point, a more detailed look at the modes of representation throughout the film must be taken.

Broughton represents his filmable life in terms of his actual films. Starting with a parody of the compositions and foreshortenings of *Mother's Day*, with his son, Orion, standing in for the young poet, the sequence proceeds through a re-montage of *The Adventures* of *Jimmy* in which Broughton played the main role, *Loony Tom, The Golden Positions, Nuptiae, This Is It* and *The Bed*. Autobiography becomes, then, for Broughton, a particular (linear) mode of interpreting his works, both cinematic and verbal.

Into this matrix of poetic origins, as an interlude in the parody of *Mother's Day*, Broughton inserts the fictitious projection, by the boy for himself, of *The Follies of Dr. Magic*. He introduces the film by saying, "To amuse myself I made my first movie," and concludes bitterly, "I thought it showed *great* promise. Unfortunately no one else thought so." The context might seduce us into assuming that the two sentences refer to *The Follies of Dr. Magic*, itself a parody of very early fantasy films, as Pathé or even Méliès made them. The title is an allusion to Gance's early anamorphic film, *The Folly of Dr. Tube*, which is conventionally chronicled as the first avant-garde film. The statement, "To amuse myself I made my first movie," however, might refer to either *The Potted Psalm*, which Broughton made with Sidney Peterson, or *Mother's Day*, his first solo film. The latter reference is more likely, although the mention of negative critical reception is applicable to both. (Here the film-maker is taking some license; for all of his early films were well received, but only within the vary narrow circle of people who knew and cared about advanced cinema.)

It would seem that Broughton is not very interested in isolating the moment or the process of artistic incarnation, but in defining the way it sustains itself. The long hiatus in his film-making, from *The Pleasure Garden* to *The Bed*, 1953–1968, does not become an issue in this cinematic autobiography. The poems of those fifteen years represent the continuity that is dominant here. In fact, "I Asked The Sea," the opening poem of *Tidings* (1964), provides the text for the opening and closing of the film:

> I asked the Sea how deep things are.
> O, said She, that depends upon
> how far you want to go.
> Well, I have a sea in me, said I,
> do you have a me in you?

As he rocks sympathetically by the shore Broughton is able to ventriloquize the ocean. But their "dialogue" gently touches upon the disharmony between the mortal self and the endlessly repeating sea. The initial appear-

ance of the empty chair suggests that indeed the "me" of the film has entered the sea forever. But after the autobiographer returns, backwards, to his seat, the sea in the final passage wants to open up the theme of death:

Let's talk of my dead,
the Sea said.
Let's not, said I
I'm dry on my dune . . .
Then, said the Sea,
When I wash up the dead
will you wade in?
I'll swim, I said.

Broughton rocking by the sea recalls a commonplace in American poetry initiated by Walt Whitman's great poems of poetic incarnation: "A Word out of the Sea" (first titled "A Child's Reminiscence" and from which the image of the ocean as "Out of the rocked cradle" comes), and "As I ebbed with an ebb of the ocean of life." The Pacific is gentler to Broughton than the Atlantic was to the suffering Whitman in delivering the same deadly message. "I'll swim" is a heroic taunt at the limitation of this metaphoric ocean, and it touches us precisely because it evokes the temporal advantage of the sea over the swimmer.

Song of the Godbody (1977) is another instance of Broughton's homage to Walt Whitman. As the poet chants seventy-six verses of a paratactic poem celebrating the body, the camera lovingly explores his body in detail. In the course of its movement the camera startlingly encounters semen on the flesh. In almost every line the poem articulates an "I" and a "You"; these two verbal "persons" acknowledge the subject/object relationship of the visible body to the camera, as the voice calls to and interiorizes the intense gaze of the cameraman.

Broughton was the undisputed master of the fusion of spoken poetry with images in cinema. In *High Kukus* (which he explained as "cookoo haikus") he parodies and explodes the single image structural film (as in Baillie's *Still Life*). The camera fixes upon a portion of pond water, masked by a circular iris, which reflects a tree and the sky and is disturbed by insects, the wind, and a falling leaf. Broughton transforms the image by giving voice to a range of things seen and unseen in the film: the sky, the tree, the wind, the waterbug, the mud, and a nutshell are among the spirits who utter through the poet a self-definition. The camera, the circle (of the iris), and the film also speak:

Anywhere you look at it,
Said the Camera.
This is the way it is.
. . .

I have no meaning,
Said the Film,
I just unreel myself.

Ernie Gehr has produced a crucial body of work since 1968.[12] Film, he has written, "is not a vehicle for ideas or portrayals of emotion outside of its own existence as emoted idea. Film is a variable intensity of light, an internal balance of time, a movement within a given space."[13] There is rarely any human activity in Gehr's films of the seventies even in the occasional instances when someone is seen sitting in a room, standing before a wall, or driving a car. The time and space which he defines as internal to film do not permit the elaboration of subjectivity in any form.

There was an early version of his most reductive film, *History* (1970), which had for its soundtrack a dramatic monologue an hour and a half long. In the form of it that he released, the film is silent and runs for forty minutes. It must be projected at sixteen frames per second to retard the frame to frame "motion" and to heighten the flickering impulse of the projector. At that speed a film cannot have a soundtrack, unless it is on a separate, non/synchronous tape (as he had provided for *Reverberation* [1969]). The image of *History*, a galaxy of fluctuating grains in a depthless black space, was generated without a lens. The film-maker exposed the film to a dimly illuminated black cloth and created the grain through successive generations of printing.

History illuminates the earlier film, *Reverberation*. There Gehr collected a series of shots of a couple posing before the wall of a public building. By refilming these shots through an optical printer he distended the time of human action so that the integrity of the couple's gestures dissolves in the prolonged gaps between the frames of the original shots; the space they occupy flattens, and they seem dwarfed by the newly emphasized monumentality of the stonework behind them. In the high-contrast, black and white texture the grain pattern of the film stock becomes visible and the bright shapes of people and stones seem almost arbitrary configurations within the grain. It is as if *History* demonstrated the primal matrix of cinema (grain and the repetitive illusions of movement) out of which the problematic representations of *Reverberation* could emerge as a limited possibility.

Serene Velocity (1970) established Gehr's reputation as a major film-maker of the generation that began exhibiting works in the sixties. It is a *tour de force* of interior rhythm with minimal exterior subject matter. Gehr filmed the empty corridor of a university building throughout a night and into the following dawn. The receding corridor registers on the screen as a shiny green field in the center of which sits a darkened square (the doors at the end of the hall). From the corners of the screen to the edges of the central square four black lines converge, almost meeting to form an "x"; they are, of course, the shaded lines where the walls join the floor and ceiling. Furthermore, a series of florescent lights on the ceiling projects a

pattern of hot spots around them, which alternate with black lines created by the symmetrical series of doors in the corridor. This combination of light and darkness generates the illusion of a series of black squares expanding from the center to the frame of the film.

We are never permitted to contemplate this pattern statically. The film-maker positioned his tripod within the corridor and then proceeded to alter his zoom lens every four frames. At first the shifts are not dramatic. He alternates four frames at 50mm with four at 55mm. After a considerable period the differential increases: 45mm to 60mm. Thus, the film proceeds with ever increasing optical shocks. In this system the zoom never "moves." The illusion of movement comes about from the adjustment of the eye from one sixth of a second of a distant image to one sixth of a second of a nearer one. Although the absolute rhythm never changes, the film effects a crescendo because of the extreme illusions of distance by the end. Furthermore, Gehr cyclically shifts the degree of exposure every frame in the phrases of four. In its overall shape *Serene Velocity* moves from a vibrating pulse within an optical depth to an accordion-like slamming and stretching of the visual field.

The temporality of the filming excluded any possibility of human action within the corridor. It is divorced from the realm of experience and re-fashioned in a purely cinematic time and space. One exterior event does leak in, however: by the end of the film dawn has broken outside the corridor. A natural light illuminates the previously dark windows in the central doors, making this severe and powerful film a reluctant *aubade*, in which we are reminded of the extreme distancing from the natural world upon which the film is predicated. This is a very muted form of the interior/exterior opposition Michael Snow made much of in *Wavelength*, where the very room he filmed became a metaphor for the recording instrument (the English word *camera* being Latin for "room") at those points when the interior darkened so that the scene outside the windows could be discerned. Gehr, however, undermines Snow's analogy of the zoom lens with a transcendental consciousness. By simultaneously moving both closer and farther away with his lens positions he achieves the uncanny effect of obliterating the (assumed) position of the camera at the starting point. This erasure of the ground coincides with the undermining of spatial and temporal authority in the film: they are all strategies for eliminating the selfhood of the film-maker from the film and for objectifying the visual phenomenon of the eventual projection.

Gehr's *Still* (1971), is less spectacular, yet technically even more impressive, than *Serene Velocity*, for in this film he succeeds in creating a range of image density from the most evanescent to opaque. For fifty-four minutes and in eight discernible sections the camera concentrates on about one third of a New York City block. From a ground-floor window he shot across the street, delimiting a moderately shallow "theatre" of the greater part of three buildings and all the pedestrian and motor traffic in front of them. Through elaborate superimpositions he was able to combine both

Four sequential frames from *Serene Velocity* by Ernie Gehr.

apparently solid figures in motion with transparent people and vehicles of varying intensities of exposure. This layering of imagery against the same background stresses the horizontal planes of movement—dominated by the right-to-left flow of one-way traffic—so that the occasional diagonal movement of a jaywalker becomes a rich visual adventure.

After an extensive presentation of this ghostly spectacle in silence, the film-maker switches to sound for the latter half of his film. The street noises hover in an ambiguous, almost synchronous relationship to the compound image. In the last of the eight sections the superimposition stops, leaving the "natural" street and its synchronous sounds. By structuring this unadulterated present moment as the terminus—rather than the starting point—of his work, Gehr offers it to our attention burdened with the accumulated suspicions of almost an hour's analysis of the fragility of the concept of the "present" within filmic representation. The opacity of the static and the translucence of temporal activity are the "emoted ideas" of *Still*, a film which instructs us that the opaque is merely the repetition of a pattern of light on the same portion of successive frames, while the translucent simply disperses its reflected light across a path on those same frames. This particular lesson has been long known through film theory, but it took Gehr's film to make it so vividly experienced.

Robert Beavers is one of the most original film-makers to have matured in the seventies. After his first film was finished he moved to Europe where he has made the remainder of his works. The best introduction to Beavers's films was written by Ken Kelman. He centers his 1971 essay on what he takes to be the master/apprentice relationship of Gregory Markopoulos and Beavers:

> The most obvious or surface similarity between the two artists' work is a lapidary quality; that is, the fastidious arrangement of exquisitely precise images—fragments of scenes—within an abstract setting roughly equivalent to plot. The entire structure thus takes on a strong sense of mosaic, in terms of pure plastic appearance; in terms of time both Beavers and Markopoulos share a concomitant and most unusual quality of static flow—the serene progression of brief images sharply distinct from one another yet not at all disjunctive in juxtaposition. Such relationship of fragments by an inner logic and an outer design in space and time was unique to Markopoulos in fact until the advent of Beavers upon the film-making scene.
>
> Most remarkable of all is that the identical central essential theme lies at the heart of late Markopoulos and early Beavers: that of life transfigured by, indeed redeemed by art.
>
> When the theme of a work is its process, when a vision concerns vision, when film is about the nature and creation of film,

> then things will hardly be what they seem. That is, the images themselves can never be taken literally, at face value, since they merely constitute a rather arbitrary material to fill the fundamental form. There is about Beavers as about Markopoulos something intensely Platonic; an unswerving devotion to the Idea, which all things *will* fit; without which there is chaos. Beavers makes this clearer and severer than his mentor, as he does away with the charms of plot and character, and insists upon the fascination with, the dedication to, the properties, powers and very materials and machinery of film.
>
> *From the Notebook of . . .* indeed goes so far as to be a statement of the identity of life process with film process; a virtually metaphysical expression and an intensely (oblique) romantic one. The moving quality of this work lies in the love implicit in such dedication, such utter immersion in the machinery of movies. The film-maker appears (in this self-portrait) as nothing more than another instrument to serve cinema. The lover and beloved become one. Nothing is seen simply through human eyes—the mediation of machinery is always crucial, always stressed. The machine is manipulated by the artist; but there is no sense, as with Brakhage, that the camera is just an extension of the eye and its powers, and cinema a mere medium (no matter how prophetic) of expression. Rather, for Beavers, cinema is the object of vision and passion, the veritable incarnation of spirit, the ideal.[14]

Kelman's emphasis on the ties to Markopoulos's cinema was, in part at least, a result of the earliness of his essay, for between *Still Light* (1970) and *From the Notebook of . . .* (1971) a clear shift in the evolution of Beavers' style can be observed. He divested his films of their nominal protagonists (who functioned as somewhat reduced, purified, and even negative versions of Markopoulos's mythic heroes) and made himself, the movements of his mind, and his relationship to his métier the subject of most of his subsequent films.

In embracing a Continental cultural tradition, Beavers did more than merely attempt to escape from the historical forces that had molded the American avant-garde cinema; he began to incorporate elements of the European artistic tradition in its most elevated forms in his films quite consciously and thematically, and thereby he tried to locate a position for film itself within that tradition. (Yet nothing could be more typical of the aspirations of American visionary film-makers.) The title of *From the Notebook of . . .*, for example, refers to the notes the film-maker kept, inspired by the notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci. The film was shot at Florentine locations mentioned in Leonardo's text. Perhaps an even more

significant reference is to Paul Valéry's *Introduction à la Méthode de Leonardo da Vinci*, the poet's early and very brilliant essay on the creative imagination which takes Leonardo as its pretext. This essay of 1894 would appear to be Beavers's model; for he also freely seizes the occasion to speculate about some possibilities and parameters of cinema. The finished film is his response to his own notes: he puts into practice, or puts to the test, his elliptical hand-written suggestions, which are incorporated in the film. A similar intellectual bridging of the Renaissance and modernity through the mediation of an earlier text recurs in *Work Done, The Painting*, and *Ruskin*. Valéry, and Ruskin for that matter, confronted and interiorized in his work the burden of his aesthetic tradition; his late Romantic efforts to reduce and purify inherited poetic language guided Beavers's cinematic enterprise.

The intertextual mediations prevent any raw, primitive encounter of the self and nature in Beavers's work. What we see in his films is a series of neat, composed, and obviously crafted "images," which are often represented in the very process of being refined. Nowhere is this more directly articulated than in *From the Notebook of. . . .* There the views of buildings, streets, and rooftops of Florence are framed so that the slightest portion of the film-maker's head—his eye, even his nose—protrudes into the edge of the scene to indicate that we are seeing him in the act of directing his attention to whatever constitutes the image. Alternately the camera will pan from a site to show us the position of the film-maker as observer. Another characteristic gesture of Beavers's style is the programmatic insertion of a filter or the manipulation of a matte to mask part of the frame. These insertions and manipulations generate the rhythmic matrix of *From the Notebook of. . . .* Furthermore, this interior rhythm dominates the temporal signature of the film (and all his films) since sequential or narrative structures are suppressed. The notes within the film confirm the impression that his work as a whole gives; namely, that he is exploring a system of proportions between the spatial dynamics of the image (angle, distance, movement) and the duration of the shot.

A comparison with the work of Gehr will clarify the unique temporality of their films. In Gehr's early films the negation of the authority of whatever is before the camera, its translation into light impulses, entails a compensatory nervous response in the form of a firmly ordered, often monomorphic, shaping of the film. Beavers's version of the imagination, on the other hand, requires acts of momentary, discriminating observation, specific to the potentials of cinema and the asequential elaboration of those acts in montage. The temporal modes of his films reflect the operations of the mind in concentrating and considering its relation to whatever it addresses itself. These operations include comparison, repetition with variation, and reconsideration under a change of perspective or intensity.

Early in *Work Done* (1972) the camera isolates a sign in an Italian shop: "E rigoramente vietato l'ingresso alle persone non addette a lavoro"

(Entrance is strictly forbidden to anyone not employed on the work). The message becomes a polemic warning to the viewer. Beavers is engaged, and would engage us, in the "work" of film-making and film-viewing; the acts of the mind that his films describe have been represented through meticulous labor within a venerable tradition, and the viewer must be prepared to perform an analogous creative act when "entering" the film. In this particularly masterful film, the tradition of the medieval and Renaissance illuminated "Book of Hours" provides the latent mediation—if a secular breviary can be imagined. Within the film itself the rebinding of an ancient book recurs several times as a metaphor for the structure of the film and its relationship to history.

However, when Beavers answered questions at the Museum of Modern Art (February 12, 1974) following a screening of the film, he alluded to the topography of Dante's *Inferno*, describing the whole film as an elaboration on the meaning of the block of ice with which it begins. The deepest recesses of Dante's Hell hold sinners encased in ice. Conversely, the most exalted image of the *Commedia* represents God as a book in which the whole universe (substance and accidents) is bound together. Despite these image associations the reference to Dante is puzzling, for Beavers's film puts up continual barriers to an allegorical reading. Although the Alpine river, the sawing and felling of forest trees, the repaving of a street cobblestones, and above all the frying of pig's blood in lard to make crepes (these, along with the bookbinding, are the dominant elements of the film) can separately sustain symbolical interpretations, the film-maker's "descent" into a symbolical landscape occurs without a fall and without fear. The rhythmical scrutiny of his careful, asymmetrical pans and intense still images draws our attention to the very thingness of the things-in-process he has filmed, and away from their positions in a symbolical constellation. Beavers is rather a "Symbolist" in the looser sense with which that word is applied to a range of late nineteenth century poets, as diverse as Mallarmé, George, and Biely, who shared a fascination with connotation. The polarity of ice and fire, the association of running water and ice, the analogy of lumbering and slaughtering shape the film and bind it in a web of internal tropes. The systematic use of displacement on his soundtracks reinforces this aesthetic.

There is neither a fall nor fear in the film because the world Beavers projects in his films lacks divinity. This, indeed, may be the most significant of his departures from the cinema of Markopoulos. Beavers's skeptical and radically aesthetic perspective centers the cinematic vision in an act of apperception that neither points beyond itself in a chain of meaning toward an absolute nor admits epiphanies. His aesthetic reduction of the religious can be found in *The Painting* (1972), a film which moves back and forth between the static Renaissance representation of "The Martyrdom of St. Hippolytus," an anonymous Flemish triptych in the style of Hugo van der Goes, and a busy traffic intersection in downtown Berne.

The painting of the martyr's body just before the horse-drawn ropes pull his limbs apart constitutes one pole in the force field of the film. Beavers shot in elegant and richly shifting detail and often reshaped it with masking mattes. The other pole is the continually moving patterns of traffic in the modern city, recorded from a never-varying still-camera position. Changes of color filters are common to both. Between them images of a shattered glass slide or camera matte and of a welter of mote-like floating disks point to the optical energies within the frame of the recording instrument. The painting and the public plaza act as models of description for cinema. Although the film brings us no closer to them as actual entities and, in fact, renders them problematic, the very process of describing them fundamentally entails a description of cinematic representation.

Ruskin (1976) treats the stern and self-disciplined power of scrutiny of John Ruskin from a characteristic remove. One can hardly guess at the film-maker's attitude to the fascinating writer who in an obscure way "mediates" the images of this dense film. There is a remote analogy, for instance, between Beavers's sometimes icy withdrawal from the immediacy of his images and the admonitory tone of *The Stones of Venice*, written as a lesson of decline for the British Empire, or the fierce defense of the "truth" of Turner's vision throughout the six volumes of *Modern Painters*. In the film, a book of Ruskin's prose appears repeatedly on the screen, intercut with some of the most frequented sites in his *oeuvre*: a mountainscape, Venice, and London. The editing establishes a chain of architectural or sculptural contours. There are natural geometries formed in the mountain terrain; then more complexly there are unstable shapes created by the interaction of landscape and fog. The constructed cityscapes of London and Venice appear as variations and elaborations of the naturally given formations; the stones of Venice, in turn, interact with the water patterns of the canals. The final link in this chain of molding or containing forces is the precise demarcations of the visual field which the film-maker imposes with his mattes and filters. In this exploration of sublime, civic, and historical locations the shaping power of the mind discovers its reflection in the elaborate connections between the forms the camera "finds" in the natural and the humanized environment. More fundamentally the film-maker charts the range of filmic space: the alternation of black and white and color, the matching of camera movements from different locations, the sudden stillness, the rhymes of mattes with patches of light, with boulders, and with facades each contribute as much as fog, water, streets, and buildings to the articulation of space within the frame.

Ruskin brings to mind the "architectural theme" that runs through *Dog Star Man*. Brakhage relentlessly analogizes trees and marble columns, leafy bowers and stained glass windows, stressing the mimesis of nature in the evolution of buildings. Beavers's film disdains that mythologizing vision and admits the weight of tradition in forming our perspective. The slate is never clear, *Ruskin* insists, and before Brakhage's primitive en-

counter with the sources of architecture there were already John Ruskin's insightful mediations. A truly modern cinema, as Beavers's work outlines it, begins by encountering the aesthetics contemporary with cinema's invention and development (rather than by envisioning an Edenic myth of camera consciousness and world) and proceeds toward a clarification of its unique role in the visionary tradition.

fourteen

The End of the 20th Century

AT THE END OF THE century the American avant-garde cinema is flourishing, despite two decades dominated by anxious discussions of crises.[1] All during that time many of the strongest film-makers of the forties, fifties, and sixties continued to produce major films, unaffected by the tides of ideological debate, while other, younger artists were energized by the issues the older generation sidestepped. In the end, every apparently massive reorientation of direction and style culminated in a reaffirmation of the fundamental continuity of genres and themes that have shaped this cinema since the Second World War.

By the late seventies and throughout most of the eighties a convergence of social and aesthetic forces suggested that a dramatic shift might be at stake. Theoretical authority had passed from the poetics of film-makers writing about their art (essentially a succession from Deren to Brakhage and Mekas, and then to Frampton and Kubelka) to academic critics under the

influence of Foucault, Derrida, and Lacan; the paradigm of modernist, or even high art, cinema was under assault; feminism became the single most dynamic arena of energy generating both new films and critical discussions; the exchange of ideas and exhibitions between America, Europe, and Asia led to an international style in avant-garde film-making. The consequences of these developments can still be felt, but in the long run, the avant-garde cinema was less profoundly affected than many other domains, even though film-makers' poetics remains in eclipse, at least as many women as men are numbered among the prominent working film-makers, and mass culture plays a considerable part in the intertextual references of many of the influential films of the past two decades.

A tendency toward international distribution, and to a lesser degree production, has actually strengthened the various national traditions within the avant-garde cinema. A brief push for feature-length, narrative films failed, yet again, to open an avenue toward wider commercial acceptance, revealing the surprising strength of film-makers clinging to the poverty of 8mm, or silent, or black and white, or hand-painted and scratched films.

The deaths of older, and some younger, film-makers seems to have altered the historical picture as much as, if not more than, the theoretical and ideological revolutions: Hollis Frampton (1984), Andy Warhol (1987), Jack Smith (1988), Harry Smith (1991), Gregory Markopoulos (1992), Marjorie Keller (1993), Paul Sharits (1993), Warren Sonbert (1995), Joyce Weiland (1998), James Broughton (1999), and Sidney Peterson (2000). Keller, Sonbert, and Frampton, who had been regularly producing influential and powerful films, died at the height of their powers; Frampton was in the midst of a vast serial epic, *Magellan*. In the cases of Warhol, Jack Smith, and Markopoulos, films which they had removed from distribution for nearly twenty years began to reappear posthumously in the nineties with renewed force.

Quiescent film-makers Peter Kubelka and Bruce Conner have had their greatest influence during this time. Kubelka's lecture tours, expounding the power of the "synch-event," has helped to form the consciousness of sound possibilities for a new generation of film-makers. That generation has massively followed Conner (and Joseph Cornell) in mining stock footage and old films for the raw materials of their works. They are film-makers who began to exhibit in the nineties, bringing with them an audience for avant-garde cinema larger and more enthusiastic than any we have seen since the early seventies. Their work is so protean and diverse that it cannot be encompassed in this chapter.[2]

WITHIN THE HISTORICAL MORPHOLOGY OF the American avant-garde cinema the Menippean satire (or Menippea) gradually became the dominant new genre. A dialogue of forms and voices, open to narrative elaborations but not requiring them, in which characters embody ideas rather than manifest complex psychologies, the Menippea

became the favorite genre of "postmodernists" internationally. Its roots are to be found in ancient Greece and its revival is by no means limited to postmodernism. All the ideas proposed in a Menippean satire are subject to irony; the very concept of a philosophical resolution becomes an occasion for parody. Fantasy and realism alternate or even coincide, more often than not with a concatenation of styles and perspectives. The Menippea frequently incorporates other genres and films-within-films.

In the American avant-garde cinema Sidney Peterson had fused the Menippea with the trance film in the late forties. Nelson's and Wiley's *The Great Blondino*, Rice's *The Queen of Sheba Meets the Atom Man*, Jonas Mekas's *Guns of the Trees*, and Landow's *Wide Angle Saxon* and *On the Marriage Broker Joke . . .* are Menippean satires. Michael Snow had even acknowledged these generic affiliations by naming his encyclopedic work of 1975 after Diderot's great example of the genre, *Rameau's Nephew*.

Yvonne Rainer, the only major American film-maker whose work is entirely in this genre, has frequently cited Godard as her source of inspiration; indeed, Godard's most influential films are Menippean satires. In a sense, her version of the Menippea, fully matured after *Kristina Talking Pictures* (1976), was born in reconciliation of the contradictory interaction of Godard and the principles of Laura Mulvey's influential essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975). Rainer's influence and that of her films has been enormous, especially on the work of younger women filmmakers, who have generally found a path between her European elective affiliations and the native avant-garde traditions.

The grand serial projects of Hollis Frampton, *Hapax Legomena* and the unfinished *Magellan*, were Menippea as well. That distinguishes them formally from Brakhage's mythopoeic and autobiographical epics. Their dialogical structure was a defense against the engulfing subjectivity at the heart of Brakhage's cinema, which Brakhage himself intuited when, amidst the most severe crisis of his career, he made his own Menippean satire, the *Faust* series (1987–1989). It was in this spirit that Frampton had in 1972 ironically proposed "Brakhage's Theorem:

> For any finite series of shots ['film'] whatsoever there exists in real time a rational narrative, such that every term in the series, together with its position, duration, partition and reference, shall be perfectly and entirely accounted for.[3]

In 1981 the feminist theorist Teresa De Lauretis, critically analyzing Snow's *Presents*, unwittingly echoed Frampton's formulation with a straight face:

> As my reading of *Presents* suggests, the production of meaning and, thus, the engagement of subjectivity in the process of seeing and hearing a film are never wholly outside of narrative . . . [Narrative] is a condition of signification and identification pro-

> cesses, and the very possibility of "seeing" is dependent on it. That Snow's recent work comes back to a referential and representational ("thematic") content . . . may evidence an awareness of this insistence of narrativity in imagistic meaning and of the tendency to narrativize at work in perception itself.[4]

REFLECTIONS ON THE STATUS OF NARRATIVE frequently occur within the filmic Menippea of the avant-garde. James Benning's *Grand Opera* (1978) is by no means his most successful film despite brilliantly defining the genre in which it and all Benning's subsequent films participate. The film itself is a self-conscious effort to overcome the impasse the film-maker felt in making structural films, albeit with interwoven narratives; it implicitly defines the generic heritage of the Menippean satire by including "talking heads" of Michael Snow, Hollis Frampton, George Landow, and Yvonne Rainer.[5] What they had in common at that time was having recently attempted to renew their work by shifting to Menippea; the three men were moving away from the largely monomorphic films I had characterized as structural cinema, and Rainer was finding her voice in cinema after turning from choreography, where her early minimalism had already evolved into complex multivoiced dances. In friendly opposition to Brakhage, whose denigrating definition of sound film as "grand opera" gave him his title, Benning boldly constructed the film to inscribe himself into the main tradition of the American avant-garde cinema, and in doing so embraced the genre in which he would work for at least twenty years.

I shall consider one of his recent elaborations of the genre. *Four Corners* (1997) explores the fate of the Anasazi Indians and the subsequent inhabitants of the American Southwest in the area where Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, and Utah meet. The interlacing of autonomous biographical sketches, indirect autobiography, paintings, and landscape studies recalls the modernist Menippea of John Dos Passos's *U.S.A.* with its collage of biographies, autobiographical stream of consciousness ("The Camera Eye") and fugal assembly of tangentially related narratives. Dos Passos fractured the components of his massive novel to suggest that each element was a synecdoche for the relentless violence and exploitation at the core of American life.[6]

Benning's indictment of genocide and racism, and his tragic view of eros and artistic expression, does not aspire to the epic scale of *U.S.A.*, three novels that span the first thirty years of the twentieth century. Instead, it hovers around the degradation of Navajo life in the Four Corners region with far-flung references to the racism of Socialist Milwaukee where Benning grew up, Monet's Paris and Giverny, Jasper Johns's childhood in Georgia, the life of the naive painter Moses Tolliver in Alabama, and an imagined biography of Yukawa, a woman who, Benning fancies, painted visionary petroglyphs in the Four Corners region fourteen hundred years before the first Europeans arrived.

Scrolling texts present thumbnail lives of Monet, Tolliver, Yukawa, and Johns, each culminating in the dramatic genesis of a painting shown in the film. Longer voice-over narratives tell (a) the story of Richard Wetherill who discovered Mesa Verde and eventually died when a Navajo shot him, (b) the history of Milwaukee and of the neighborhood where Benning lived, (c) the history of Indian migration to Chaco Canyon and their subsequent domination by Spaniards and Americans, and (d) the story of the murder of Benji Benally, an educated Navajo who took to drink when he could not find work. The three white teenagers who killed him and two other Navajos served less than two years in a reformatory.

Benning's camera is predominantly static, coolly contemplating nearly desolate landscapes, archeological sites, slums, and factory exteriors. We see Chaco Canyon in summer, a slum corner with few people stirring in Milwaukee in the autumn, the Mesa Verde ruins in the snow, a sordid spring in Farmington, New Mexico where Benally died: a liquor store, vagrant Indians, alleyways, a housing project for Navajos, their barren graveyard, and a church. In twenty-five years Benning has performed a radical ascesis of the witty, vibrant formal compositions which together with startling sound juxtapositions characterized his *8½×11* (1974), *11×14* (1976), and *One Way Boogie Woogie* (1977), the three films that first commanded critical attention, identifying him as one of the most original film-makers of his generation.

In 1989 Brakhage had also filmed Mesa Verde—the chief Anasazi site—in *Faust 4*, the last section of his own excursion into Menippean satire, the "Faust" series (1987–1989). He used footage from that visit more extensively for the second of his four-part *Visions in Meditation* (1989). In that section he also used quotations from Walter G. Chase's filmed records of epileptic seizures (1905), found in the Paper Print Collection of the Library of Congress (earlier a source for Jacobs, Frampton, and others in quest of images of origination in American film history), collapsing the origins of the American documentary into his vision of the shamanistic haunting of the abandoned site.

Brakhage began the eighties with two related series of silent "abstract" films—modulations of color and light without identifiable imagery—*The Roman Numeral Series* (1979–1981), nine films "which explore the possibilities of making equivalents of 'moving visual thinking', that pre-language, pre-'picture' realm of the mind which provides the physical *grounds* for image making (imagination), thus the very substance of the birth of imagery," and *The Arabic Numeral Series* (1980–1982), nineteen "abstract" films "formed by the intrinsic grammar of the most inner (perhaps prenatal) structure of thought itself."

However, most of his energetic output of films in the eighties refracted the prolonged crisis culminating in the end of his marriage to Jane Collum in which he had been so invested as an artist and polemicist. The key films representing aspects of that agony would be *Tortured Dust* (1984), a four-part film of sexual tensions surrounding life at home with his two teenage

sons, *Confession* (1986), depicting a love affair near the end of his marriage (1987), and the *Faust* series (1987–1989), his Menippean satire in four autonomous sound films reinterpreting the legend that obsessed Brakhage throughout his career.

The first two sections of the *Faust* series, *Faustfilm: An Opera* and *Faust's Other: An Idyll*, are psycho-dramas recalling the film-maker's *Flesh of Morning* and *Cat's Cradle* respectively. In them he reaches beyond his own earlier achievements to seek renewal from the latent energies of his senior contemporaries; the first has ostensible debts to Peterson's *Mr. Frenhofer and the Minotaur*, and the second to Anger's *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome*. The third in the series, *Faust 3: Candida Albacore*, clearly a collaboration with a group of younger performers, continues to mine Peterson's film for inspiration and calls upon the Peterson–Broughton collaboration, *The Potted Psalm* as well. In *Faust 4* Brakhage breaks loose from the restrictive, almost crippling regression to psycho-drama (and the pitfalls of collaboration) by shifting genre to the moving vehicle lyric, a form Brakhage had seized and perfected as one of his initial filmic signatures. With the camera in his car he travels and shoots in Kansas, Texas, and at Mesa Verde, which he intercut with short images of his Faust and his "Other."

The Faust films are occasions for the film-maker to return to the scenes of his aesthetic origins and his artistic growth. The equivocal distance he must establish in order to keep elements of nostalgia, erotic desperation, and exorcism from overwhelming the project required a version of Menippean satire. Brakhage's inheritance of Menippea comes directly from Peterson, unlike Benning's more elaborate tradition stemming from Frampton, Snow, Landow, and above all Rainer (and through her Godard). The title of the first part of the Faust series apparently reiterates the analogy that Benning ironized: the fusion of sound and image, language and picture as "opera." His discomfort with the ironies of the genre is evident in the first three parts. He has said:

> By part 4 I had to work my way out because I knew by then that I had to free myself from psychodrama, and from the dramatics of *Faust* itself, and inherit the landscape again. Part 4 is the obliteration by single frame of the memories of the past in the swell of the earth and in the desert. Also, by this time, I had met and fallen in love with Marilyn [Jull, whom he married shortly afterwards], and the film resulted from a road trip we took during which I photographed the landscapes of the west and the midwest. So in Part 4 there is no story really—but a going to the desert to rid myself of these "pictures" and encompass the whole spectrum of sky and earth and what lies between the two.[7]

The willful "obliteration of the memories of the past" leads him to Mesa Verde. The uncanny intuition of horror that he claims to have ex-

perienced at the site remained with him and found expression in the second of his *Visions in Meditation*.

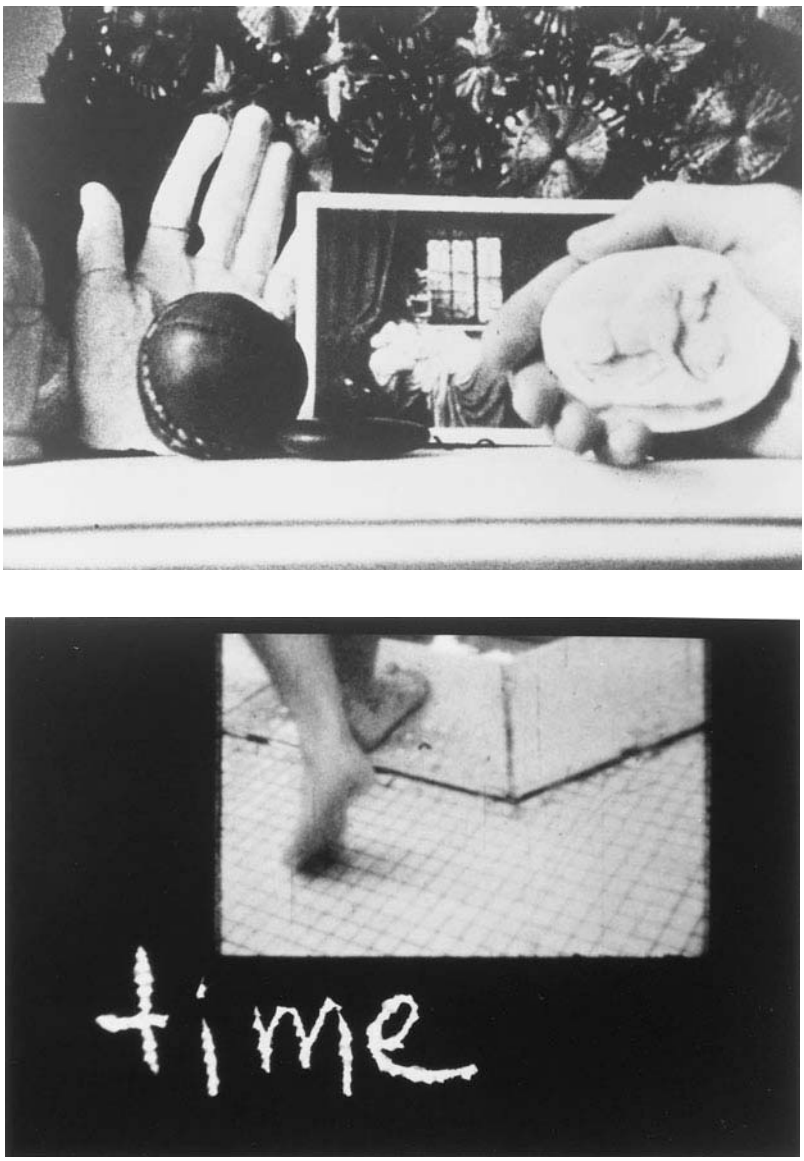
In Benning's *Four Corners* the ruins of Mesa Verde are lonely, almost deserted vestiges of a civilization destroyed by European and American imperialism, fragments of a utopia allegorized by the fiction of Yukawa who "on her nineteenth birthday . . . achieved the holy right to mark the canyon walls" with visionary paintings. He attributes the abandonment of Mesa Verde to "a severe decline in summer rains," rather than the occult intimation of a horrible event Brakhage suggests, or cannibalism, the thesis of Christy Turner II.[8]

THE PROTOTYPE OF BENNING'S MENIPPEA would be Yvonne Rainer's *Journeys from Berlin/1971* (1980); I am selecting her strongest film for illustration, although almost any of her films would serve in a discussion of almost any of Benning's. In *Journeys from Berlin/1971* she fused together readings from her adolescent diary, fictional psychoanalytical sessions—film scholar Annette Michelson plays the analysand—an art world conversation largely about Ulrike Meinhof spoken by film critic Amy Taubin and performance artist Vito Acconci, and a crawling text of political events, especially repression, in West Germany between 1950 and 1997. The images show the psychoanalytic session from highly stylized angles corresponding to the alternation of the analysts played by a man and a boy. The objects on his desk often change. There is also a slow pan of a mantlepiece with often incongruous objects relating to the art world conversation which is otherwise never visualized. Figures move in a mannered way before a modern Berlin church; one woman gives another a recorder lesson. But above all, the aerial images of Stonehenge and the Berlin Wall have a relevance to the use of Mesa Verde in Benning's film.

Stonehenge had been a focus of fascination for a generation of American sculptors in the 1960s, when Rainer, then a dancer and choreographer, was living with the sculptor Robert Morris. Gerald S. Hawkins's *Stonehenge Decoded* (1965) had been widely read at the time. In *Journeys from Berlin/1971* the symbolic equation of Stonehenge with the Berlin Wall implies that the ruin, misidentified in legend as a Druidic temple and sacrificial center, may be another monument to cruelty and repression. Such is the penultimate irony of Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* when the exhausted heroine wakes up on the so-called altar stone of Stonehenge, as if she were its sacrificial victim.

The influence of Hawkins's interpretation of Stonehenge as an observatory of solar and lunar phenomena can be glimpsed in the note Hollis Frampton provided for his *Hapax Legomena: Ordinary Matter* (1972):

> A vision of a journey, during which the eye of the mind drives headlong through Salisbury Cloister (a monument to enclosure), Brooklyn Bridge (a monument to connection), Stonehenge (a



Symbolic objects on the mantelpiece in Yvonne Rainer's *Journeys from Berlin/1971* and the fusion of scratched words and gymnasium images in Su Friedrich's *Gently Down the Stream*.

> monument to the intercourse between consciousness and LIGHT) . . . visiting along the way meadows, barns, waters where I now live; and ending in the remembered cornfields of my childhood. The soundtrack annexes, as *mantram*, the Wade-Giles syllabary of the Chinese language.[9]

The moving camera uniting the architectural and natural sites, the fusion of personal, autobiographical (the Chinese syllabary obliquely refers to Frampton's emulation of his mentor, Ezra Pound), and world-historical allusions are typical of the American avant-garde cinema's appropriation of Menippean satire. *Ordinary Matter* is a reprise, transferred to hyperbole, of the film that first drew attention to the film-maker, *Surface Tension* (1968), which included a fast-motion crossing of the Brooklyn Bridge and a commentary in German.

Frampton's Stonehenge has neither political or magical overtones: it is an enduring "monument" to aesthetic purity, rational thought, and breathtaking engineering. In Frampton's hands the rhythmic enjambment of sites, historical periods, and architectural uses serves to divest each element of its religious, ritual, or practical function. Conversely, Kenneth Anger's only widely released film since 1972, *Lucifer Rising* (1980), uses a megalithic temple (not Stonehenge) and a number of ancient Egyptian sites in a Crowleyan ritual hymn to chthonian and ouranian deities of power and light. The cutting among sacred locations eschews the detachment of comparative mythology in favor of an eclectic ceremonial paganism, fulfilling an aspiration expressed by Maya Deren in the late forties.

The coincidence of these evocations of ancient vestiges of lost, and to varying degrees enigmatic, monuments can help us define the nature and range of the Menippean satire as a genre of avant-garde cinema. To begin with the negative instance, *Lucifer Rising* is a ritual hymn; it uses the ruins of temples to retrieve the immanent mystery and power the film-maker-magus felt at those places. They are not, as in the other examples from Benning, Brakhage, Rainer, and Frampton, woven into a dialogic text that problematizes their meaning.

The strictest example of the Menippea among these would be Rainer's film. There she undercuts the imagistic sublimity of Stonehenge early in the film with the metaphor of the Berlin Wall. Above all, it is Rainer's use of language that gives the moving aerial shots of Stonehenge so complex a resonance.[10] She keys those shots to the reading of excerpts from the diary of her teenage years, documenting a preoccupation with social justice and an intense resistance to both emotional manipulation—from songs, movies—and adolescent narcissism.

Similarly, Benning elaborates his versions of the Menippean satire primarily through the suggestive strings of aporias he fashions from images of nearly deserted places, joined to printed and spoken texts. But Frampton and Brakhage build their more tentative Menippeas out of the serial linking of autonomous units, mostly short structural and lyrical films. *Hapax*

Legomena uses a different linguistic strategy in four of its seven parts: the Chinese of *Ordinary Matter* is the most minimal and obscure; I described the ironical autobiographical narrative of *(nostalgia)* in the previous chapter; in *Critical Mass* a young couple's fierce argument is reorganized as a fugue; and in *Poetic Justice* we read, a page at a time, the scenario of a phantasmagoria involving "I", "you," and "your lover." In the *Faust* series the use of language is concentrated in short voice-over narrations written and spoken by the film-maker in all but the third part; in the first two there are fragmentary snatches of dialogue as well. On the other hand, *Visions in Meditation* is a series of travel lyrics with no generic or formal dissonance among them; it has no voice-over; insofar as it posits a dramatic persona, it is the same questing and observing self in all four parts: so, it is not a Menippean satire.

The Menippea is particularly suited to the testing of ideas. Its peculiar florescence in the late seventies and its remarkable continuity for two decades reflects a general crisis in high culture and a particular one within the American avant-garde cinema. The more general issue has usually been discussed as "postmodernism" and includes a rejection of distinctions been high and mass culture, an iconoclasm of artistic authority, relentless politicization of all themes, and an insatiable desire to unmask ideology. In such a climate Menippean satire flourishes among literary genres. Internationally the cinema has responded with its own versions of Menippea: Godard, Greenaway, even Woody Allen have made it their signature genre. But it is far from an artifact of postmodernism, merely a preferred element of the tradition.

In the more confined theater of the American avant-garde cinema, the revival of Menippean satire was a response to the crisis brought about as film-makers came to feel the exhaustion of structural cinema. It was natural, then, that the reaction should come from within: Landow, Snow, and Frampton made Menippea that addressed the ideational matrix of structural cinema so that it seemed, at the time, that their new forms were fundamentally a development and extension of structural cinema. However, Rainer, entering film-making from dance, at first collaborating with Babette Mangolte, a French camerawoman with aesthetic affiliation to the work of Godard, brought a political vision and infectious vigor to the Menippean satire. Benning, who began making films with strong allegiances to structural cinema, while desiring to find a place for both narrative and political criticism in his work, found himself uniquely situated to profit from Rainer's example.

Brakhage's excursion into Menippea was another matter. The marriage which had been the focus of so much of his film-making dissolved, and at the same time structural cinema virtually disappeared, depriving him of the aesthetic nemesis that had fructified his oppositional polemics and practice. In the ensuing personal crisis he turned back to the psychodrama where his work originated, to the ideational genre of his elective mentor, Sidney Peterson, and to a desperate collaboration with young ad-

mirers. He emerged from that single excursion into Menippean satire purged of those demons and committed to a prolific outpouring of new films, most of them hand-painted but including photographed lyrics of the highest order.

RAINER'S PROMINENCE AS AN AVANT-GARDE choreographer accelerated her recognition as film-maker, and her feminism, her Godardlike pastiche of quotations and allusions (often to the heroes of the Left and to European theoreticians) gave her immediately a heroic stature that younger women film-makers with the same intellectual orientation earned more slowly. That younger generation, represented by Su Friedrich, Leslie Thornton, and Abigail Child, among many others, have transferred the themes and even some of the cinematic rhetoric of Rainer's films, shorn of her debts to Godard and even Bergman, to the native tradition of the lyrical-compensatory film, bringing about the most significant renewal of energies within the avant-garde cinema of the 1980s, by challenging the male dominated subgenres: autobiography, serial epics, dream journals.

Two years after she started making films, Su Friedrich scratched her dream journal onto leader and images of a woman exercising: *Gently Down the Stream* (1981). With an optical printer she manipulated the rhythms of the scratched words, otherwise reminiscent of Brakhage's titles, which he may have derived from Larry Jordan's film *Man Is in Pain* (1955). By the 1980s, access to optical printers was widespread among avant-garde film-makers. These machines, which permitted the artist to rephotograph previously processed strips of film at different speeds, forwards or backwards, and to enlarge or mask-out parts of the image, began to appear in institutional film-making departments in the late 1970s and were even privately owned (sometimes homemade) by a few film-makers in the 1980s.

Friedrich uses the optical printer minimally to slow down the flickering words, freeze the surf on a beach, or isolate the image of a woman exercising in a gymnasium on part of the screen, leaving the rest as a black background for her writing. The extraordinary force of the film comes directly from the well-timed progression of the pared-down text which captures the mystery and terror of dreams, even more vividly than Frampton's verbal phantasmagoria, *Hapax Legomena: Poetic Justice*, to which it owes a debt comparable to that to Brakhage. Yet, what is most remarkable about Friedrich's pulsing words is the way they invest the film's scanty and casual black and white images with strange power and beauty.

Some early, jumpy shots of plaster saints prepare the first of several controlling metaphors when we read "walk / into / church / my / mother / trembles / trances / reciting / a / prayer / about / orgasm." The subsequent images of a woman on a rowing machine and another swimming in a pool suggest that exercise has become a substitute for prayer, the gymnasium an ersatz church. Sexual imagery and animal violence dominate the rest

of the text. The drama progresses from intimations of primal scenes in church and on a stage in which the etching poet is a witness to surprising acts of erotic possession: "I make a second vagina . . . I draw a man, take his skin, inflate it, get excited, mount it . . . I lie in the gutter giving birth to myself . . ."

Su Friedrich does give birth to herself as a major film-maker in this fourteen-minute silent film. As the imagery moves from the gymnasium pool to the ocean shore and the open sea, the power of language and song become the theme of the dream poem. She hears a chorus of five women spelling out "the word for truth in German but she spells "B-L-I-N-D-N-E-S-S.' " She rejects the oneiric suggestion that the women sing "a very clever pun" in her mother's native language, implying in her rejection that the price of an abstract, theoretical truth is blindness by scratching the letters over swiftly moving images of light sparkling on the sea. Then, when she dreams that "a leopard eats two blue hummingbirds" she feels in a phonetic and syntactic eruption the "er / utter / mutter / flutter" of the feathers "humming" on her "bones / hearts / tongue."

Late in the film, the fin of a large sea creature can be seen in the water, as if she were filming from a whale watch excursion. Although it rhymes visually with the woman we had earlier seen swimming in the gymnasium, it also charts the evolution of the imagery from the figure who commands her erotic fascination to the Dionysian emblem of her own poetic incarnation; for the dolphin and the leopard are the bestial companions of the god of wine and inspired drama.

She avoided the Menippea of the period of her coming to maturity as a film-maker: her films represent a free movement amid avant-garde and narrative genres: collage, psycho-drama, autobiography, portrait. Her critical and analytical portraits of her mother (*The Ties that Bind* [1984]) and her father (*Sink or Swim* [1990]) are her most powerful films. The latter owes something to Frampton's use of alphabetical models in *Zorns Lemma*. Like several of the best film-makers of her generation, Friedrich deals explicitly with lesbian issues, making us aware of the earlier neglect of this passion, even in a tradition that has been remarkably daring in its bold treatment of male homosexuality.

ABIGAIL CHILD TOO TRACES HER INHERITANCE through Brakhage and Frampton:

> I've also learned great amounts from Stan Brakhage and Hollis Frampton, through their liberating ideas about film: that you didn't need plot, that anything can be used, their sense of the visual nature of the medium, of all the areas which had not been tried. Frampton was using words, which was especially appealing to me, a modern poetry of images. You could say *sugar*, for example, and film *black*, take things of different kinds, in

> surprising or unstable relations, and let that direct your process.[11]

Child intimates here that the theoretical stances of Brakhage and Frampton, even more than any of their films, influenced her. In "Film in the House of the Word," Frampton rejected Brakhage's claim that the suppression of naming leads to a recovery of vision. To the opening question of *Metaphors on Vision*: "How many colors are there in a field of grass for a crawling baby unaware of 'green,' "[12] he answered that the child would see no colors without language. He argued,

> Every artistic dialogue that concludes in a decision to ostracize the word is disingenuous to the degree that it succeeds in concealing from itself its fear of the word . . . and the source of that fear: that language in every culture, before it becomes an arena of discourse, is, above all, an expanding arena of power, claiming for itself and its wielders all it can seize, and relinquishing nothing.[13]

Brakhage had theorized the primacy of visual experience in film as a reclamation of preverbal seeing. Frampton's most influential, and liberatory gesture, was to validate language as both a structural model and privileged topic for avant-garde cinema. For Child, and many film-makers of her generation, the theoretical passions had shifted to the arena of gender (sometimes of social class and race as well), so she could claim as her inheritance both Brakhage's metaphor of cinema as vision and Frampton's linguistic preoccupations. Crucially, she and her contemporaries were guided by Brakhage's insistence that the film-maker should build a film out of what he or she sees on the developed filmstrip with all its "errors" and imperfections, rather than a preconceived imaginary image which the film-maker attempts to capture in successive 'takes.'

The serial structures of Child's *Is This What You Were Born For?* [1981–1987 in six parts: *Prefaces*, *Both*, *Mutiny*, *Covert Action*, *Perils*, *Mayhem*, *Mercy*] and Leslie Thornton's *Peggy and Fred in Hell* [1984–1992, continuing in six parts, two 16mm film, three video, one simultaneous projection of film and video] derive from Brakhage's *Dog Star Man*, even though the former strongly repudiates Brakhage's edenic sexuality and the latter his idealization of the child as a model of the visionary.

Child's urban Menippea offers no moment of pure origin: consciousness is embedded from its beginning in an intersubjective welter of codified gestures, dissonant sounds, and inherited genres of representation and emulation. Thornton, on the other hand, situates her isolated siblings "making their way through a post-apocalyptic landscape . . . not a sensible world, a horrible world, limiting, blind, stupid, arrogant, like any culture."[14]

A FRAGMENTARY GLIMPSE OF THE ISSUES AT stake, especially for women film-makers, in this period can be had in the correspondence between Abigail Child and Marjorie Keller in 1989.

Keller, preparing an article on Child's *Mayhem*, writes:

> I am assuming that the split in the film into its dramatic and pornographic elements was *the* overriding design decision of the film and that somehow that split allowed you to bridge a fissure you saw as otherwise unresolvable. . . . In my own films, especially *Misconception*, partitioning off segments of events (or event if that's how you see childbirth) was the only way *I* could deal with the enormity of what I was representing. It allowed for a step back and a new point of view in my consideration of documentary form. So then, I ask myself, what is that fissure? In terms of the whole project of *Is This What You Were Born For?* (which as I see it is the rewriting of American film history in your own terms with, loosely, *Prefaces* as documentary, *Mutiny* as musical/dance extravaganza, *Covert Action* as home movie, *Perils* as American silent film melodrama. *Mayhem* spans both *film noir* and narrative pornography. And so the manifest split is there in trying to rework two separate genres in one film. But my gut feeling is that there is a latent dichotomy that you are driving at that can only be gotten to by a kind of stereo vision.) . . . I see it as trying to reconcile what I will, for lack of a better term, call the lyricism of your earlier film style and roots, with the recent demands on women filmmakers prescribing sexual politics as *the* subject of every film. What those politics are are ambiguous to me (and I place positive value on that), but I venture to say they have something to do with switching roles (in the first part) and asserting women's pleasure in watching the watcher (in the second half). Both of these loom large in feminist film theory no matter whether you trace it from Peter Gidal's refusal to include women in his films in the early '70s, or from Laura Mulvey's doomed and dooming essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema."
>
> Now, what the sexual politics *don't* seem to be about is the avant garde tradition. Again, it's a result of reading beneath the surface references of the film because, on the surface, *Mayhem* can be seen as a kind of compilation of 3 avant garde dinosaurs: *Flaming Creatures* in it sultry menages, Snow's *Presents* in its structural split and film referentiality, and Brakhage's *Loving* in its voyeurism and joi [*sic*] d'amour. And all three of these films have been accused of sexism and obscenity by critics of diverse persuasions. . . . I'm sure you read and heard some of the stuff. The most egregious is in Teresa De Lauretis' *Alice Doesn't*, where she takes Snow to task for not allowing women space in

his film except as objects of his lurid camera eye. Not even as film viewers, as if we were somehow excluded by the very sight of a naked female.

. . . It seems to me that *Mayhem* is particularly timely in countering the recent puritanical tide against sex in film that has resulted from feminists as diverse as the Women Against Pornography group and Yvonne Rainer. This seems to cast you back again with the older avant garde tradition (including Schneemann) that portrayed, without a blush, women and men in the act(s). . . . What pressed you to be so unabashed in flatly presenting found porn and how do you respond when that part of *Mayhem* is attacked?

Child responded:

There in no grand split as I see it. Noir is latently pornographic. The pornographic is about seduction. And in this particular piece—shaken, broken, as it is, there is an archetypal fiction complete with parallel editing (as in Griffith), a garden (of Eden), and the stolen pearl (of beauty). The voyeur becomes us, as I intercut the story that had come before, intercut, indite, corrupt. . . . The fissure you imagine you imagine. . . . It is not a "manifest split" but a construction. I did feel the need to uncover and the footage that came my way while I was futilely trying to create that was a perfect image of the model narrative, which was my concern to begin with.

You are close perhaps in your reading of BORN FOR? though I see PREFACES as a sound ORNAMENTALS, encyclopedic and MUTINY as the perverse/reversed documentary. MAYHEM is a homage to Noir and makes surface what is latent in the Noir, in the feature suspense. hung on promises of flesh and violence. . . .

MAYHEM is a continuation of my concerns, not some magnum break. This is why MAYHEM should be shown with COVERT ACTION and PERILS. It gains context and authenticity. In both content and form. I am analyzing coded gestures. I am choreographing the body. I am using sound as the lead—a different process shape from the other parts of BORN FOR?

Switching roles and women's pleasure are for me throughout the film.

I am thoroughly responsible for my images. Through gender mixes, multiple 'leads', graphic design, undertow on the forward motion (of the plot) and sound example I try to keep conscious. In editing I found one heroine discovered her pursuers were kissing. I realized: we fear what we desire, we desire what we fear. The way could open out. My conclusion could enter (actually

> penultimate conclusion). Something could go awry in the plan of constant chase or women as devil doll (the Hollywood manifestation). The titles return to frame this 'pastoral'. . . .
>
> "What pressed you to be so unabashed" Why not? One of my intentions was to embarrass myself, though in all honesty I did *not* since somewhere towards the close of the editing, I realized the question(s) were/are different, that I had answered whatever questions—of light and film and search and love—I had wanted to know. The process has revised the issue.

This exchange looks back to Carolee Schneemann's *Fuses* (1964–1968), an erotic lyric in Brakhage's manner—hand-held camera, superimpositions, enacted by the film-maker and her lover, James Tenney.[15] Feminist film-makers of the seventies and eighties called attention to the remarkable candor and energy of *Fuses* and especially to its celebration of female desire. It also anticipates the explicit sexuality of a film such as Peggy Awesh's and Keith Sanborn's *The Deadman* (1989), an adaption of Georges Bataille's short story in which a young woman leaves the corpse of her dead lover to exhibit herself and fornicate recklessly in a tavern.

THE LYRIC GENRE JONAS MEKAS FIRST identified and heralded as the diary film has been misnamed. Even his own continuing great work, *Diaries, Notes, and Sketches*, which he began with *Walden* and has continued through at least nine subsequent films,[16] is not precisely a diary, if we define that genre as a chronological sequence of dated passages. The three categories, diaries, notes, and sketches, share a negative relation to lapidary, fully constructed and finished achievements; they are *quotidian lyrics*, spontaneous, perhaps tentative, records of a sensibility in the midst of, or fresh from, experience. Some artists encouraged the diary metaphor by their titles: Peter Hutton's *Images of Asian Music (A Diary from Life 1973–74)*; most of Howard Guttenplan's films, for example, *European Diary '79 (Criss-Crossings)* (1979); several of Robert Huot's films, e.g. *Diary 1974–75* (1974–1978). However, many of the film-makers Mekas designated as diarists have been quick to repudiate the label.

Andrew Noren:

> I never thought of it [*The Adventures of the Exquisite Corpse, Part One: Huge Pupils*] as "diary"; in fact, I doubt if I was consciously thinking in terms of any particular form at all. Jonas Mekas described it as such after the fact, I think because he *was* consciously working that form and saw some affinities, but that concept was never useful to me. I think what was really at work was my old fascination with "news," in this case news of what I took to be heaven. The style and stance are there, hand-held and eye-level, steadfast and innocent of artifice and mortality—

> innocent, period. Trying to "record" that light storm of ghostly beauty blowing around me, doomed in the attempt as we always are. And ghosts they were and are: the people by now aged to unrecognizability, the animals dust long since, the rooms themselves demolished; the only remaining trace is a length of decaying plastic with a few inaccurate shadows, rapidly fading.[17]

Noren eloquently articulates the elegiac tone emanating from his own celebrations of the particulars of daily life. It is characteristic of the quotidian lyric as a whole. In fact, three of Mekas's "diaries" are actually threnodies centering on footage of a recently dead friend: *Notes for Jerome* (1978), *Scenes from the Life of Andy Warhol* (1991), *Zefiro Torna: Scenes from the Life of George Maciunas* (1992).[18] Warren Sonbert's *The Cup and the Lip* (1986) includes images of his mother's burial.

Peter Hutton:

> When I made *Lodz Symphony*, I said to my Polish friends, "You know, this film is not going to make any sense to you now, but in ten or fifteen years you may well appreciate that someone actually recorded the atmosphere of this city at this particular time."[19]

In a sense this genre is closely related to home movies. But home movies freed from their deadly conventions: historic landmarks, descriptive pans, a concentration on what is collectively considered important, the evasion of "unpleasant" events, automatically homogenized exposures. While the avant-garde quotidian lyric shares the home-movie maker's recognition of the importance of place, of family celebrations, of capturing the look of people and things against the pressures of time, it is also particularly receptive to nuances of light intensity and to the articulation of mood through the film-maker's manipulation of the time in which events are represented. Once Mekas recognized in his initial diaristic footage "that what was missing was *myself* . . . It affected my exposures, movements, the pacing, everything."[20] Voice-over commentary may be the most blatant method Mekas used to inscribe himself in his films.

However, the absence of a soundtrack (in Noren's, Hutton's, and most of Sonbert's films) and the use of black and white (for Noren's films since 1974 and all of Hutton's) emphasizes the luminous, compositional, and temporal subtleties of the quotidian lyric. Crudely, if the home movie apes the habits and topoi of snapshots, the quotidian lyric finds cinematic equivalents to the compositions, moods, luminous densities, and textures of high art photography. The home movie's conventions are particularly anesthetizing within the temporality of the shot, legislating a pacing that does not risk the "boredom" of long contemplation or the "incomprehension" of very fast editing. The quotidian lyric oscillates between the extremes of pixillated and time-lapse compression and the dilation of time in extended

metonomies of landscape or close-up details. Hutton attributed the leisurely pace of his imagery to the training of his sensibility as a merchant seaman. Noren tends to sustain the contemplative tempo of *Huge Pupils* even into the time-lapse photography of his latest installment, *Imaginary Light* (1995). Once Sonbert found his mature style (*Carriage Trade* [1968–1972]), he maintained a relatively fast editing pace in all his films. Mekas, of course, continues to punctuate longer shots with the staccato intensity of single-frame bursts.

Noren calls his continuing serial film *The Adventures of the Exquisite Corpse* to conceptualize the function of chance in the internal organization of each part. They are not the result of a number of artists representing an imagined body without reference to each other's work, as the original exquisite corpse of the Surrealists was. Rather, by building up the film following the order of shooting, the film-maker renders the intimate "news" as a sequence of fortuitous observations and elliptical perceptual acts. Not all quotidian lyrics follow this procedure, but they all prefer a paratactic linearity that suppresses or reduces thematic organization. Hutton stressed parataxis by titling an early work *July '71 in San Francisco, Living at Beach Street, Working at Canyon Cinema, Swimming in the Valley of the Moon* (1971). Brakhage may be the most pervasive influence on the makers of quotidian lyrics but he has seldom made them himself—his minor *Films by Stan Brakhage: An Avant-Garde Home Movie* (1962) is an obvious exception—because of the dominance of thematic montage in his practice.

Noren's best critic, Bruce Elder, sees his parataxis as a form of anaphora, which he illustrates by quoting Christopher Smart's "Jubilate Agno," an enthusiasm of Noren's.[21] But anaphora requires the systematic repetition of a semantic marker to indicate the commencement of each unit in the series—in Smart's poem long series of lines beginning with "Let" or "For." It is precisely the absence of such a marker that distinguishes the quotidian lyric. Yet again Mekas's work has to be distinguished from the genre I am describing and which he has influenced. While never using dated entries, he has usually subdivided his films with intertitles or, in the central panel of *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania*, numbered "glimpses."

As the citations of Noren and Hutton reveal, the quotidian lyric emphasizes presence to evoke absence, crams the frame with vitality to connote mortality, and represents isolation and withdrawal with hyperboles of sociability, festivity, and civic pageants. The erotic candor of Noren's *Huge Pupils*, in which the film-maker recorded himself in periodic acts of intercourse and oral sex, uncannily disrupts the identification of the camera eye with that of the viewer: the lubricious synecdoches insist that the eye through which we have been sharing the details of urban pleasure—a steaming mug of tea, sunlight on a floor, friends on a New York rooftop—has an inaccessible locus in the film-maker's body; and more radically, the film-maker, in observing his own libidinous ecstasies, marks the poignancy

of their ephemerality. For Elder the tension between the carnal representation and the aporia of tactility becomes the crux of *Huge Pupils*: "What Noren discovers . . . is that the pristine self hides even from intimate relations. He initially proposes that one discovers one's self in intimate relations with others, then proceeds to bring that claim into doubt."[22]

Contrary to Noren's astute observation on the influence of Mekas's practice on his critical thinking, Mekas himself is actually engaged less in keeping a film diary than in making an elaborately structured autobiography uniquely confined to events he has filmed rather than the full range of his memory. In a lecture on *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania*, he discussed the substitutional rhetoric of his cinema:

> [T]hings . . . kept coming back again and again. I thought each time I filmed something different. But it wasn't so. . . . Like, for example, the snow. There is practically no snow in New York . . . When I started looking at my film diaries again, I noticed that they contained everything that New York *didn't have* . . . In truth, I am filming my childhood, not New York. It's a fantasy New York—fiction.[23]

Within each of his completed films the quotidian lyrics, "notes" and "sketches," are examined, usually after a considerable passage of time, and restructured in an editing process that crucially deploys intertitles and voice-over, and the symbolical use of musical quotations, to support the autobiographical scaffolding.

Mekas's enthusiasm for his contemporaries and his modesty and reticence about his own achievements as a film-maker contributed to the underestimation of his stature in the sixties and seventies. However, in the last twenty years his reputation has steadily grown, as he has completed film after film consistent with the project he initiated in the early 1960s. Congruent with the magnitude of his recording of the pulse of the New York art world for forty years is his slow revelation of the reflective self. By the nineties it was apparent that Mekas was one of the central filmmakers of the American avant-garde.

The intricate construction of Sonbert's films obviates any representation of events in the order or pattern of their happening. Characteristically he brings together short shots from his extensive travels. Here is a fragment of his own shot list for *Friendly Witness* (1989), a film he edited to rock songs in a reprise of his earliest practice:

127 Girls back forth swing
128 Sam & postcards
129 Brief Taj Mahal
130 Mick Jagger walk
131 Brief bright Sphinx
132 Frank & Harvey on corner

133 Fiji sunsets
134 Dancing Morocco men
135 B&W plane curve
136 Little girl at desk writing[24]

Such global associationism so utterly denies the power of sequential time to write the meaning of daily events for the observing and filming self that the resistance to temporal succession itself looms large in the films. This pattern is even clearer when we see several Sonbert films in one screening; for he would return again and again to his ever-growing archive of recorded material to cull passages so similar to what he had previously used of a parade, portrait, train ride, etc., that it can be difficult to recognize the often minute differences in the representation of an event or site in different films. The teasing play of variation is at the heart of his aesthetic. Furthermore, thematic foci determine the selection of material and the principles of variation. *Noblesse Oblige* (1978–1981) explores the relationship of self to news reporting during the rioting that followed the murders of Mayor Moscone and Harvey Milk and the trial of Dan White. *A Woman's Touch* (1983) takes on the film-maker's fascination and identification with stylish women. Along with the return to a soundtrack, *Friendly Witness* tests the possibility of recovering the dithyrambic enthusiasm with which he first embraced a rhetoric of global montage and measures the wistfulness and nostalgias inherent in the twenty-some years since his previous sound film.

In 1980 Sonbert identified the themes of some of his films and even provided musical analogies:

> *Carriage Trade* . . . is about travel, transportation, anthropological investigation: 4 continents, 4 organized religions, customs; about time with its 6 years in the making and cast of thousands; about how the same people age and grow and even change apartments over 6 years. *Rude Awakening* is about Western civilization and its work/activity ethic and the viability of performing functions and activities. *Divided Loyalties* is about art vs. industry and their various crossovers. . . . *Noblesse Oblige* is about journalism, reportage, news events that you might see on the 6 o'clock report, how the news is created, how it might effect our lives, and journalists' responsibilities. . . . And I indeed regard the works in a Mozartian key scheme: *Carriage Trade* being E-flat Major, broad, epic, leisurely, maestoso; *Rude Awakening* in D minor, brooding, cynical, fatalistic, dancing on the precipice; *Divided Loyalties* in C Major, agile, dynamic, spry, with a hint of turbulence.[25]

Such hints from the film-maker should lead us to consider his films as works within the dominant genre pioneered by Brakhage: the crisis lyric.

Nothing here suggests what I have been calling the quotidian film. In fact, Sonbert, in the same lecture, said; "The great hero i[n] film history is Stan Brakhage, who 'liberated' film. He made the tactile qualities the major concern and showed that 'mistakes,' errors could have an expressive, demonic, psychological function."[26]

Yet Sonbert is both more tentative and more subtle in his articulation of themes than Brakhage. All of his films, from *Carriage Trade* on, share a distinctive framework. They are "world melodies" to adapt from Walter Ruttmann, whose *Berlin—Die Symfonie der Grosstadt* (1927) gave the name "city symphony" to a genre of film, after his *Die Melodie der Welt* (1929). Continually fusing images from different countries and cultures through a gridwork of images of motion—shot from vehicles, of vehicles, and on foot—that attest to his restless, insatiable hunger for images, he orchestrated the thematic thrust of individual films by association. It is easy to see these films as chapters in one open-ended work. He once said as much himself in conclusion to the observation on Mozartian key signatures: "and even this scheme of keys can be seen as a classical instrumental concerto: first movement [*Carriage Trade*] setting the scene and longest in time and investigation; the second movement [*Rude Awakening*] a dark melancholy adagio; the third [*Divided Loyalties*] a breezy rondo to clear if not quite dispel the heavy air, gracious, with a let's-get-on-with-life feeling, a caper and a capper to what has gone before."

City symphonies and world melodies are closely related to quotidian films. With a loosening of the thematic dominance characteristic of the "city symphonies" of the twenties which sought to portray urban rhythms from morning to night, the representation of the mood of a city or place is supplanted by the mood of the film-maker in that place. Nowhere is the reciprocal nature of these forms so clearly demonstrated as in the cinema of Peter Hutton, who has made films of most of the places he has lived or worked: San Francisco, New York, Boston, Budapest, Lodz, and the Hudson Valley. Hutton's films are all silent, usually in black and white, slow paced, often with fades or black leader isolating shots. He measures his consciousness of what he sees by surprising himself:

> Having the luxury to behold the simplest things can often be a revelation in itself, and it can be metaphorically transformed into meaning as well. . . . There's . . . a fairly obvious quality to black and white, in terms of film history; it tends to take us back in time rather than project us forward. That also can be a bit of a reprieve for an audience, like being taken out of time and suspended in a space where there is no overt reference to daily experience. . . . My films are a way of subtly tweaking that [still photography's] formal approach to beauty by allowing another language to come in: movement and transformation. On the other hand, there's often an attempt to 'stop time' letting

> time be an overriding element that provides some small revelation about the image. Mine is an extremely reductive strategy.[27]

The contemplative pace of Hutton's cinema owes something to structural film, which the film-maker has inherited not from the severe ironists, Snow, Frampton, or Landow, but through the mediation of the sensual approach of Bruce Baillie. Hutton himself acknowledges the influence of Asian teachers, from his adolescence in Hawaii and, above all, his experience as a merchant seaman: "I was nurtured on the tradition of the free spirit wandering around the world recording impressions. . . . You can actually go backwards in time on a ship, you can sail into a storm and make no headway . . . Being on a ship forced me to slow down, and allowed me to take time to look."[28]

IN *THE THREE FACES OF THE FILM* (1960)

Parker Tyler had collected some of his most important essays on avant-garde and modernist cinema, filmic myths and rituals, and cultural criticism under the rubrics "The Art: more or less fine," "The Dream: more or less mythical," and "The Cult: more or less refined." These three categories dominate his crucial work on American avant-garde film in the fifties. At that time, inspired by the depth and seriousness of his criticism, I began to formulate the schemata underlying this book. My greatest resistance, however, was to the notion of the *cult*—of "the *Big* Experimental Film," of "displaced laughter," of "the direct imaging of the human face." In retrospect I have to concede the astuteness and appropriateness of this category of Tyler's analysis. The American avant-garde cinema has nourished itself on its cultic denial of the commercial cinema in general and it has renewed itself periodically through cultic devotions—to silent film, 8mm and Super-8mm projections, local aesthetics, collegial loyalties, confederacies of sexual preference, and so on.

Besides the enduring institutions dedicated to exhibiting avant-garde films, and the colleges and universities where they are regularly a part of the curriculum and attract an audience somewhat wider than the registered students, some informal and more intimate screenings have had a powerful influence, especially among film-makers and the most ardent viewers. In San Francisco, Nathaniel Dorsky has promoted a devotion to avant-garde cinema that included the reverential appreciation of a number of feature film-makers such as Hitchcock, Sirk, and Rossellini. Brakhage, sponsoring a weekly salon screening of a few films—sometimes his own, or those in the collection he amassed trading with his contemporaries, or those of visitors—, has nurtured a group almost exclusively focussed on the cultivation of avant-garde works. Saul Levine has made the classrooms and the screenings of the Massachusetts College of Art, in Boston, a meeting place for the larger community of local film-makers. The graduates and faculty of the film department of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago

have serially spun off venues for showing their own and others' work in that city.

Brakhage, Dorsky, and Levine are among the film-makers who exemplify a life devoted to the art of cinema to the ephebes drawn to their screenings and conversation. Dorsky had ceased to exhibit his films for nearly twenty years, but since the completion of his long quotidian lyric, *Hours for Jerome, Parts 1 and 2* (1980–1982)—which alludes to the medieval books of hours in its title and follows a seasonal structure, recalling daily life with his companion, Jerome Hiler, in the late sixties—he has regularly released films that celebrate the textural properties of the celluloid image. *Pneuma* (1977–1983), a film of grain patterns reveals, in the film-maker's catalogue description: "A world . . . that is alive with the organic deterioration of film itself, the essence of cinema in its before-image, preconceptual purity. The present twilight of reversal reality has made this collection a fond farewell to those short-lived but hardy emulsions." *17 Reasons Why* (1983) is a film of unslit 8mm images, four to each 16mm frame; in *Alaya* (1976–1987), sand patterns become metaphors for film grain.

A parallel to Dorsky's passion for the beauty of filmic matter is Morgan Fischer's autobiographical film, *Standard Gauge* (1984), similar to Frampton's *(nostalgia)*, in which we see in 16mm, snippets of 35mm film on an editing table, as Fisher wryly narrates the history of his labors in the penumbra of the Hollywood film industry and lovingly describes his contacts with the "standard gauge" of feature film-making with a self-parody of his cultic relationship to film.

Retrospectively, in the hard light of digital "special effects," the optical printer has come to be a nearly archaic artisanal tool. In the hands of Pat O'Neill, Phil Solomon (who has recently become Brakhage's collaborator when he requires optical printing of his hand-painted films), and Bill Brand, the optical printer has become a primary tool of filmic invention. Writing of *Saugus Series* (1974), to my mind O'Neill's most exciting film, I described the impression his synthetic space gives us. It is consistent with that of his later, longer works, including *Water and Power* (1989):

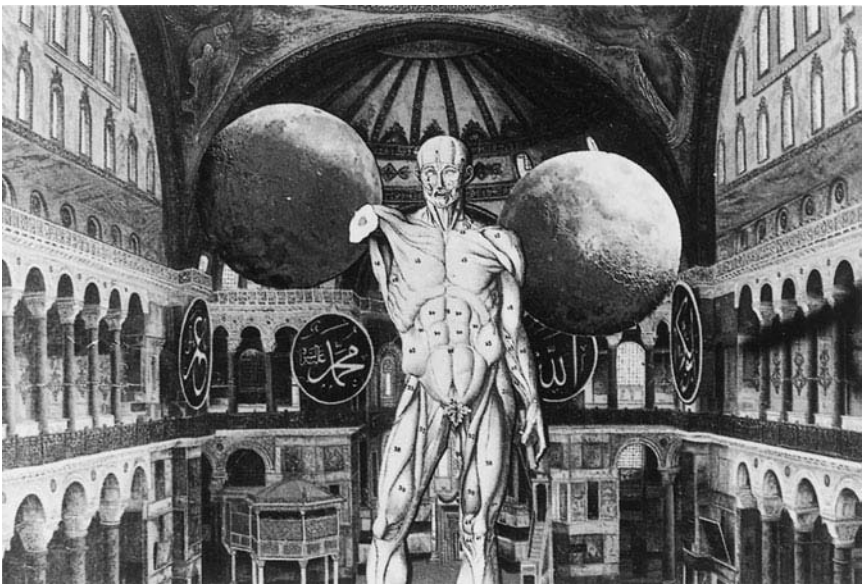
> By stressing the synthetic power of the optical printer, the film-maker has undercut the option of seducing us into the landscape he has invented. Thus, despite any superficial resemblance to the fusion inherent in surrealist images, such as those of Magritte, these curious made-up spaces flash invisible do-not-enter signs; the fragments which are assembled within them put up resistance, carting their initial contexts along with them: they are problematic metonymies . . . O'Neill, a native of southern California, seems to be telling us that a symbolic and psychologically personalized landscape loses its significance in a place like Los Angeles which is so overwhelmed by fragmented representations and gerrybuilt perspectives.[29]

The central achievements of the graphic cinema in this period also reflect the tactility of the medium. Robert Breer's films turned back from the minimalist sheen of his work in the early seventies to the playful drawing and coloring of his films of the early sixties. Lewis Klahr became the most prominent animator of the subsequent generation. His works are cutout collages, for the most part filmed in Super 8mm, that openly flaunt their direct, artisanal manipulation of images minutely budged from frame to frame. The masterpiece of this mode, Larry Jordan's magisterial *Sophie's Place* (1986), directly acknowledges the convergence of a religious, cultic site and what he calls his "alchemical autobiography"; for "Sophie's Place" is the Byzantine interior of the Church of Hagia Sophia, which forms the backdrop for much of the phantasmagoria of unpremeditated collage juxtapositions as images float and collide in its immense nave.

In *Circles of Confusion*, Hollis Frampton describes four modes of composition for post-Symbolist art. One he called "constriction": the reduction of a canon to a single author. His example was James Joyce: "the works from which he derived the laws that govern his writing were those of one author, Gustave Flaubert." A similar case in the history of the American avant-garde cinema would be that of Robert Beavers; a parallel hyperbolic claim might be that he constricted the history of the cinema to the films of Gregory Markopoulos, whom Beavers met in 1965 and with whom he lived for the next twenty-seven years, until Markopoulos's death.

In the mid-1970s Markopoulos withdrew his films from distribution and envisioned the ultimate cultic center, a pilgrimage site in rural Greece to be devoted solely to the cyclical screenings of his and Beavers's films: The Temenos (literally "temple precinct") where he hoped to build a theater and archive eventually. In the eighties, outdoor exhibitions were held annually on the site. The major work of Markopoulos's last fifteen years was the re-editing of his entire corpus for screenings in the Temenos; he restructured his work into the more than one hundred cycles of *Enaios*, which would take more than eighty hours to show.

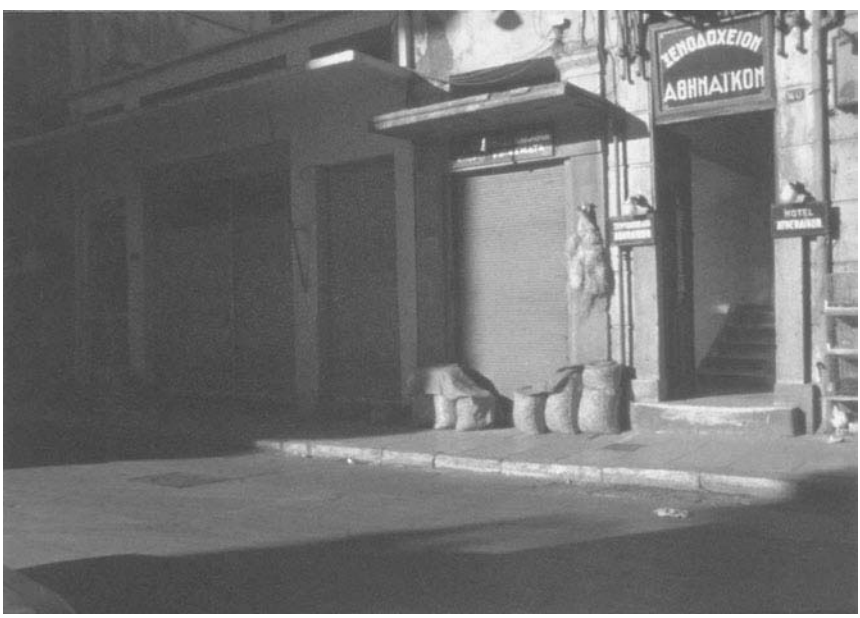
Beavers conceived of three cycles which would constitute his collected films, entitled *My Hand Outstretched to the Winged Distance and Sightless Measure*. The third cycle, when it is completed, will consist of nine films—the longest of them a half hour—made since 1975. Two are not yet completed: one on themes from Borromini's architecture, another on paintings of Sassetta. The films of his third cycle dramatize the problematic status of the image by repeatedly interweaving gestures of signification—especially hand movements, glimpses of a natural theater in Salzburg, maintained in topiary shrubs, and allusions to vessels of storage. Having tacitly repudiated the mannerism and mythopoeia of Markopoulos's cinema, Beavers divested his art of any appeal to a myth of originary experience and even to most references to extracinematic emotions. The consequent projection of noetic movement, as the coming into being and testing of perceptions, associations, and ideas, invests his work with lucid serenity.



Phantasmagoria within the cultic center in Larry Jordan's *Sophie's Place* and the quotidian lyric: Peter Hutton's *New York Landscape, Part 1*.

Under his persistent gaze the polished isolation of solid things and simple acts gives way to the picturing of a restless mind, repeatedly attempting and almost succeeding in defining the peculiar timbre of a place and finding the measure of his presence in it. The films themselves succeed so startlingly because the film-maker has so subtly comprehended the structural impossibility of absolutely coming to that definition. In *Efpsychi* (1983) he may be acknowledging the perpetually deferred teleological moment in this paradox by repeating the Greek word "telftia" [last things] on the soundtrack.

In its purity and conceptual rigor Beavers's achievement is matched by that of Ernie Gehr. His very rapid evolution as a film artist entailed the radical divestment of almost all recoverable traces of an autobiographical or affective relationship to the visual field towards which he directed his camera. For, if in some of his first films the sentiment linking the image and the film-maker recalls Brakhage's hyperpersonal gaze, neither the institutional corridor we see in *Serene Velocity*, nor the flowing New York traffic of *Still*, nor the isolated vehicles in *Shift* (1971–1974), nor the brick wall of the short untitled film of 1977, nor the Berlin streets of *Signal—Germany on the Air* (1982–1985) appear on the screen as privileged images or epiphanic moments. The film-maker maintains the type of cool and distant isolation from his nominal subjects that Warhol practiced, although by focussing on things and places rather than people (or by de-individualizing them by shooting from above or in grainy slow motion), Gehr's films never suggest Warhol's cruelty.



Robert Beavers's *Efpsychi*. Copyright Robert Beavers, courtesy Temenos Archive.

For almost every film of his maturity Gehr has created a cinematographic strategy specific to his subject. For instance, in *Eureka* (1974) he rephotographed and thereby extended in slow motion a turn-of-the-century film of San Francisco, shot from a moving cable car. This is the same technique he had used in monumentalizing a few shots of Andrew Noren and a girlfriend in *Reverberation* (1969, revised 1986). But in the later work the gesture is more hyperbolical (extending a five-minute film to thirty minutes), more monomorphic (there is only one shot), and more distanced from the film-maker (the original was made at least fifty years before he was born, rather than being a portrait of friends). The title comes from a sign on a vehicle in the film, but it is just as much the exclamation of an Archimedean insight into the origins and the nature of film itself. In fact, each of Gehr's films has an implied exclamation of "I have discovered . . ." The direct object of that discovery in each is the fusion of a visual subject and a filmic technique that interact to create what he has called "an emoted idea."

Shift brilliantly combines fragmentary compositions of a New York street, shot from high above, with a sound-effects track of street noises. Severe angles, reverse motion, sudden disappearances, and the imaginary "close-ups" suggested by the sounds demonstrate, for the first time, Gehr's consummate craft as an editor, and his formal perfectionism. *Untitled: Part One 1981* (revised 1986), *Signal—Germany on the Air*, and *This Side of Paradise* (1991) refract the film-maker's identification with the displaced Jews of his parents' generation. Again shooting down in the street, but not from the lofty height of *Shift*, he observes the movements, gestures, meetings, and crossings of elderly immigrants in the first film. The second and the third were shot in Berlin: *Signal—Germany on the Air* dwells on the sites of buildings prominent in the Third Reich, with a static camera, interrogating the undistinguished locations for unretrievable signs of the scandalous past; in the third film, he walks his camera through the Potsadamer Platz flea market in the last days of West Berlin, surveying the dingy wares Poles were offering for sale in a field of mud and reflective puddles.

Gehr linked his dazzling *Side/Walk/Shuttle* (1991) to his films of European displacement:

> The initial inspiration for the film was an outdoor glass elevator and the visual, spatial and gravitational possibilities it presented me with. The work was also informed by an interest in panoramas, urban landscape, as well as the topography of San Francisco. Finally, the shape and character of the work was tempered by reflections on a lifetime of displacement, moving from place to place and haunted by recurring memories of other places I once passed through.[30]

In twenty-four sensuous long takes, Gehr's camera rides up and down the exterior elevator, often panning as it glides. The transformation of the

high-rise cityscape into a fluid antigravitational image conjures a disorienting, oneiric music from visions of the street emerging from the sky, or flowing sideways across the screen.

Gehr himself has written: "A shot has to do with a variable intensity of light, and internal balance of time dependent upon an intermittent movement and a movement within a given space dependent upon persistence of vision . . . [Film] does not reflect on life, it embodies the life of the mind. It is not a vehicle for ideas or portrayals of emotion outside of its own existence as emoted idea."

The recognition that has come to Beavers, Dorsky, and Levine in the nineties after decades of obscurity and neglect is a significant index of the revitalization of the audience for the American avant-garde film. J Hoberman recently introduced a symposium with these comments on "Tracking the Resurgence of Experimental Film":

> Given the relative lack of critical attention, who could have predicted the audience that thronged the Whitney [Museum of American Art] for its mind-bogglingly comprehensive retrospective of American avant-garde cinema last fall, or the crowds that packed the Walter Reade [cinema of Lincoln Center for the Arts] last month for an evening of lyrical diary-films by Nathaniel Dorsky? Similarly, legendary underground figures like the protean Ken Jacobs and minimalist composer Tony Conrad are lionized by audiences born years after these men made their structuralist blockbusters.[31]

As important as any of the events Hoberman mentioned was the Museum of Modern Art's two-year exhibition of small gauge (8mm, Super 8mm) films curated by Steve Anker and Jutta Jensen and shown weekly at a small screening room, often to overflowing audiences.[32] That museum's central venue for avant-garde cinema, the monthly Cineprobe series, has lasted thirty years. The Millennium Film Workshop has survived even longer. The San Francisco Cinematheque and Anthology Film Archives have shown similar resilience.

Thus, the evolution of the expansive Menippea was countered by the cultivation of the exquisite small film. As film-makers recognized the consequences of video and digital technology's removal of the raw material from the domain of touch, the cutting and gluing of montage, scratching and painting on the celluloid surface, micro-adjustments of collage scraps, manual aligning of synchronization on the editing table, and the threading of projectors became rituals in the reaffirmation of the fundamental values of the filmic image. On a larger scale the veneration of the cinema's unique illusions of movement and depth can be seen in Ken Jacobs's three-dimensional projections—"the Nervous System"—with two homemade, variable speed machines. The thrall of what film can do lies at the heart of what I am calling, after Tyler, the cult of the avant-garde film.

Notes

PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

1. Dana Polan, in *The Political Languages of Film and the Avant Garde* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985), criticized *Visionary Film* for its indifference to the historical forces shaping the American avant-garde cinema. David James's excellent *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988) addresses that issue. Patricia Mellencamp's *Indiscretions: Avant-Garde Film, Video, and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990) articulated the most extensive of several feminist criticisms of my book; Lauren Rabinovitz's *Points of Resistance: Women, Power & Politics in the New York Avant-Garde Cinema 1943–71* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991) offers a corrective history, centering on the contribution of women film-makers; unfortunately Menken is not discussed. The best treatment of her work is in Stan Brakhage's *Film at Wit's End: Eight Avant-Garde Filmmakers* (Kingston: Documentext, 1989; hereafter *FWE*).

1. MESHES OF THE AFTERNOON

1. Salvador Dali, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dali* (London: Vision, 1968), trans. Haakon Chevalier, p. 212.

2. Luis Buñuel, "Notes on the Making of *Un Chien Andalou*," *Art in Cinema*, ed. Frank Stauffacher (San Francisco Museum of Art, 1947), pp. 29–30.

3. See Stuart Liebman's "*Un Chien andalou*: The Talking Cure," in *Dada and Surrealist Films*, ed. Rudolf E. Kuenzli (New York: Willis Locker & Owens, 1987), for a discussion of language in the film.

4. See Jan-Christopher Horak, ed., *Lovers of the Cinema: The First American Film Avant-Garde, 1919–1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996). Horak and several of his contributors criticize *Visionary Film* for its neglect of the American precursors of Deren and Hammid. The same perspective informs *Unseen Cinema: Early American Avant-Garde Filmmaking 1893–1941*, ed. Bruce Posner (New York: Anthology Film Archives, 2001).

5. Maya Deren, *Notes, Essays, Letters*, in *Film Culture*, 39 (Winter 1965), p. 1.

6. VeVe A. Clark, Millicent Hodson, and Catrina Neiman, *The Legend of Maya Deren: A Documentary Biography and Collected Works, Volume One, Part One: Signatures (1917–42)* (New York: Anthology Film Archives/Film Culture, 1984) and *Part Two: Chambers (1942–47)* (New York: Anthology Film Archives/Film Culture, 1988), extensively document Hammid's role. Their work is the most thorough ever published on an American avant-garde film-maker; it has facilitated a large and growing literature on Deren. See Thomas Valasek, "Alexander Hammid: A Survey of his Film-Making," *Film Culture*, 67–68–69 (1979); Stan Brakhage, *FWE*.

7. Luis Buñuel, *L'Age d'Or and Un Chien Andalou*, trans. Marianne Alexandre (London: Villiers, 1968), p. 90.

8. I discuss *L'etoile de mer* more extensively in *Modernist Montage: The Obscurity of Vision in Cinema and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990; hereafter *MM*), pp. 26–34.

2. RITUAL AND NATURE

1. Parker Tyler, *The Three Faces of the Film* (New York: Yoseloff, 1960), picture caption opp. p. 96.

2. Ibid., picture caption opp. p. 96.

3. Deren, *Notes*, p. 30.

4. Maya Deren, "Chamber Films," *Filmwise*, 2 (1961), pp. 37–38.

5. P. Adams Sitney, "Imagism in Four Avant-Garde Films," *Film Culture*, 31 (Winter 1963–1964)

6. Deren, *Notes*, p. 18.

7. Deren, "Chamber Films," pp. 38–39.

8. Deren, *Notes*, p. 31.

9. Ibid., p. 13.

10. Ibid., p. 17.

11. Maya Deren, *The Divine Horsemen: Voodoo Gods of Haiti* (New York: Chelsea House, 1970), pp. 5–6.

12. Deren, *Notes*, p. 27.

13. Maya Deren, "Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality," *Daedalus* (Winter 1960), pp. 154–55.

14. Maya Deren, "Cinema as an Art Form," *Introduction to the Art of the Movies*, ed. Lewis Jacobs (New York: Noonday, 1960), p. 258.

15. Deren, "Cinematography," p. 167.

16. Deren, "Cinema as an Art Form," p. 262.

17. Deren, *Notes*, p. 65.

18. Ibid., p. 63.
19. Ibid., p. 74.
20. Ibid., p. 30.
21. Ibid., p. 70.
22. Ibid., p. 70.
23. Ibid., p. 70.

3. THE POTTED PSALM

1. A chapter on Peterson was suppressed from Broughton's memoirs, *Coming Unbuttoned* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1993). The manuscript is in the collection of Broughton papers at the library of Kent State University. Peterson wrote *The Dark of the Screen* (New York: Anthology Film Archives, 1980) in response to Broughton's first book of film poetics, *Seeing the Light* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1977). City Lights published the second, *Making Light of It*, in 1992. *Film Culture* 61 (1975) is devoted to Broughton; see Stan Brakhage's *FWE* for chapters on both film-makers.

2. Sidney Peterson, "*The Potted Psalm*," in *Art in Cinema*, pp. 61–62.

3. René Clair, "Picabia, Satie, et la Première *Entr'Acte,*" *L'Avant-Scene*, 86 (Nov. 1968), trans. Kate Manheim, p. 5.

4. Ibid., p. 11.

5. Unpublished notes deposited at Anthology Film Archives, New York.

6. In 1981 Peterson completed *Man in a Bubble*, which he shot with students in a film-making course he gave at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, summer 1979.

7. See Dore Ashton, *A Fable of Modern Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1980), for a discussion of the influence of Balzac's story on Cezanne, Picasso, and Rilke. I discuss this film in more detail in *MM*, pp. 11–16.

8. Interview with the author, recorded in July and August 1970.

9. Sidney Peterson, "Cine-Dance," *Dance Perspectives, 30* (Summer 1967), p. 16.

10. Ibid., p. 16.

11. Ibid., p. 16.

12. Ibid., p. 19.

13. Parker Tyler, "*The Lead Shoes,*" Cinema 16 program notes (New York, April 21, 1954).

14. Gregory Taylor's "Beyond Interpretation: *The Lead Shoes* as Abstract Film," *Millennium Film Journal*, 25 (Summer 1991), pp. 78–99, offers an interesting reading of the film.

15. James Broughton, "What Magic in Lanterns?," unpublished manuscript at Anthology Film Archives.

16. Sidney Peterson, "A Note on Comedy in the Experimental Film," *Film Culture*, 29 (Summer 1963), p. 28.

17. The Greek terms *sparagmos* and *omophagia* refer to stages in obscure Orphic rites as attested in Plutarch and early Church fathers and discussed in E. R. Dodds's *The Greeks and the Irrational*. The terms literally mean the "ripping apart" and the "eating of flesh." This rite surfaces in literary history with *The Bacchae* of Euripides, in which Dionysiac rites of animal *sparagmos* culminate in the cannibalistic death of Pentheus. In this book I have used the term *sparagmos* to underline the ritual origins of the numerous scenes of dismember-

ment in the American avant-garde cinema. I have also used it for both explicit thematic manifestations of the rite and for those cinematic tropes which more obliquely allude to it.

18. Broughton, notes at Anthology Film Archives.

19. Maya Deren, Parker Tyler, Dylan Thomas, Arthur Miller, and Willard Maas, "Poetry and the Film: A Symposium," *Film Culture*, 29 (Summer 1963), p. 29.

20. Ibid., pp. 56–57.

21. Ibid., p. 59.

22. See R. Bruce Elder's *A Body of Vision: Representations of the Body in Recent Film and Poetry* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997; hereafter *BOV*), pp. 70–87, for a discussion of the body in *The Bed* and *The Golden Positions*.

23. Broughton, notes at Anthology Film Archives.

4. THE MAGUS

1. Tony Rayns, "Lucifer: A Kenneth Anger Compendium," *Cinema*, 4 (London, Oct. 1969). The recent extended studies of Anger are Robert A. Haller, *Kenneth Anger* (Minneapolis: Film in the Cities, 1980); Pierre Hecker, *Les Films "Magicks" de Kenneth Anger* (Paris: Paris Experimental, 1999); and William C. Wees, *Light Moving in Time: Studies in the Visual Aesthetics of Avant-garde Films* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992, hereafter *LMT*). Bill Landis, *Anger: The Unauthorized Biography of Kenneth Anger* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995), is unreliable.

2. Lewis Jacobs, "Avant-Garde Production in America," *Experiment in the Film*, ed. Roger Manville (London: Grey Walls, 1948), p. 136.

3. Kenneth Anger, "Filmography," *Film Culture*, 31 (Winter 1963–1964), p. 8.

4. Ibid., p. 8.

5. Kenneth Anger, *Magick Lantern Cycle* (New York: Film-Makers Cinematheque, 1966), p. 4.

6. Rayns, "Lucifer," p. 29.

7. Anger, *Magick Lantern Cycle*, p. 3.

8. Kenneth Anger, *"Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome,"* Cinema 16 Film Notes (April 4, 1956).

9. Bruce Martin and Joe Medjuck, "Kenneth Anger," *Take One*, 1, no. 6 (1967), p. 13.

10. Kenneth Anger, "Aleister Crowley and Merlin Magick," *Friends* (September 18, 1970), p. 16.

11. See Noel Carroll, *Interpreting the Moving Image* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 214–24, for the use of condensation in the symbolism of the film.

12. Anger, *Magick Lantern Cycle*, pp. 3–4.

13. Juan Antonio Suarez, *Bike Boys, Drag Queens & Superstars: Avant-garde, Mass Culture, and Gay Identities in the 1960s Underground Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. 141–80, emphasizes the influence of mass culture on *Scorpio Rising*.

14. Rayns, "Lucifer," p. 30.

15. Anger, *Magick Lantern Cycle*, p. 11.

16. René Wellek, *Discriminations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 113.

17. Kenneth Anger, *"Invocation of My Demon Brother," Film Culture*, 48–49 (Spring 1970), p. 1.

18. Rayns, "Lucifer," p. 24.

5. FROM TRANCE TO MYTH

1. Gregory Markopoulos, "Psyche's Search for the Herb of Invunerability." *Filmwise*, 3–4 (1963), p. 7.

2. Unpublished notes, originally intended for Cinema 16 Film Notes, now in Anthology Film Archives.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Donald Weinstein, "*Swain*; Flowers and Flight," *Filmwise*, 3–4 (1963), p. 28.

6. Charles Boultenhouse, *"Serenity," Filmwise*, 3–4 (1963), p. 41.

7. Gregory Markopoulos, *"From Fanshawe* to *Swain," Film Culture*, 41 (Summer 1966), p. 19. Many of Markopoulos's articles have been collected in *Chaos Phaos*, 4 vols. (Florence: Temenos, 1970).

8. Gregory Markopoulos, "Excerpts from a Tentative Script for *Twice a Man," Film Culture*, 29 (Summer 1963), p. 14.

9. Gregory Markopoulos, "The Driving Rhythm," *Film Culture*, 40 (Spring 1966), p. 33.

10. Gregory Markopoulos, "Towards a New Narrative Film Form," *Film Culture*, 31 (Winter 1963–1964), p. 11.

11. Ibid., pp. 11–12.

12. Gregory Markopoulos, "The Film-maker as the Physician of the Future," *Film Culture*, 44 (Spring 1967), p. 61.

13. Ibid., p. 61.

14. Robert Lamberton, "Himself as Herself," *Link* (Spring 1967), p. 17.

15. *Film-Makers' Cooperative Catalogue*, 4 (New York, 1967), p. 98.

16. "Special Events Program," Radio Free Europe, May 10, 1966, transcription in Anthology Film Archives.

17. Gregory Markopoulos, "The Event Inside the Camera," in *Retrospective Gregory Markopoulos*, catalogue of Undependent Film Center (Munich, 1970), pages unnumbered.

18. Unpublished notes, Anthology Film Archives.

19. Film-Makers' Cinematheque program notes, April 18–30, 1968.

20. Letter to Stan Brakhage, July 20, 1963.

21. Harold Bloom, "The Internalization of the Quest-Romance," *Romanticism and Consciousness*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Norton, 1970), p. 6.

22. Gregory Markopoulos, "Projection of Thoughts," *Film Culture*, 32 (Spring 1964), p. 3.

23. Gregory Markopoulos, "Institutions, Customs, Landscapes," *Film Digest*, 23–24 (1967). Reprinted in *Chaos Phaos*, vol. 3, pp. 83–84.

24. An important work on Markopoulos is John G. Hanhardt and Matthew Yokobosky, *Gregory J. Markopoulos: Mythic Themes. Portraiture, and Films of Place* (New York: Whitney Museum of Art, 1996); *Millennium Film Journal*, 32–33 [Robert Beavers, Gregory J. Markopoulos] (Fall 1998).

6. THE LYRICAL FILM

1. Bloom, "The Internalization of the Quest-Romance," p. 7.

2. The literature by and on Brakhage is extensive; in addition to *FWE*, he has published *Metaphors on Vision*, ed. P. Adams Sitney, in *Film Culture*, 30 (Autumn 1963, reprinted 1976); *Brakhage Scrapbook: Collected Writings 1964–1980*, ed. Robert A. Haller (New Paltz: Documentext, 1982); *Essential Brakhage: Selected Writings on Filmmaking*, ed. Bruce MacPherson (New Paltz: Documentext, 2001); and *Film Biographies* (Berkeley: Turtle Island, 1977). R. Bruce Elder's magisterial *The Films of Stan Brakhage in the American Tradition of Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, and Charles Olson* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Lauriers University Press, 1998) interprets Brakhage's films in terms of their literary ancestors. See also James, *Allegories of Cinema*, pp. 28–57; Annette Michelson, "Camera Lucida/Camera Obscura," *Artforum*, 11, no. 5 (January 1973); Marie Nesthus, *Stan Brakhage* (Minneapolis: Film in the Cities, 1979); Wees's *LMT* discusses several Brakhage films in terms of the film-maker's theories of vision.

3. The thirty Songs themselves have several subdivisions: 15 *Song Traits, 23rd Psalm Branch*, and *Song XXVII: "My Mountain" and Rivers* contain parts which might be considered as individual works. In fact, Brakhage does list the 16mm film *Two: Creely/McClure*, which is incorporated in 8mm in 15 *Song Traits*, as a separate item in his filmography.

4. Stan Brakhage, "On *Anticipation of the Night*," *Filmwise* (1961), pp. 19–20.

5. Gertrude Stein, "Miss Furr and Miss Skeene," *Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein* (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 564.

6. Brakhage, *Metaphors on Vision*, p. 25. I have numbered the otherwise unnumbered page for convenient reference.

7. Ibid., p. 23.

8. Ibid., p. 59.

9. Ibid., p. 26.

10. There is a lucid discussion of the editing of *Window Water Baby Moving* in James Peterson's *Dreams of Chaos, Visions of Order: Understanding the American Avant-Garde Cinema* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994), pp. 53–57.

11. Brakhage, *Metaphors on Vision*, p. 19.

12. Ibid., pp. 9–10.

13. Ibid., p. 14.

14. Ibid., p. 80.

15. Ibid., p. 77.

16. An unpublished interview with the author in the spring of 1965. A transcript is in the library of the Anthology Film Archives.

17. For an extended discussion of *Blue Moses* see *MM*, pp. 196–203.

18. Work on Baillie includes Lucy Fisher, "*Castro Street*: The Sensibility of Style," *Film Quarterly*, 29, no. 3 (Spring 1976); Alan Williams, "The Structure of Lyric: Baillie's *To Parsifal*," *Film Quarterly*, 29, no. 3 (Spring 1976); "Ernest Callenbach, *Bruce Baillie* (Minneapolis: Film in the Cities, 1979); *Film Culture*, 67–68–69 (1979); Scott MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema: Interviews with Independent Filmmakers* 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); and Timoleon Wilkins, ed., *Bruce Baillie—Life, Work* (San Francisco: SF Cinematheque, 1995).

19. *Canyon Cinema Cooperative Catalogue*, 3 (Sausalito, 1972), p. 19.

20. Richard Whitehall, "An Interview with Bruce Baillie," *Film Culture*, 47 (Spring 1969), p. 19.

21. Richard Corliss, "Bruce Baillie: An Interview," *Film Comment*, 7, no. 1 (Spring 1971), p. 31.

22. See *MM*, pp. 207–9.

23. *Film-Makers' Cooperative Catalogue*, 5 (New York, 1971), pp. 23–24.

7. MAJOR MYTHOPOEIA

1. Dan Clark, *Brakhage* (*Film-Makers' Cinematheque Monograph Series*, 2; New York, 1966), and Fred Camper, "*The Art of Vision*: A Film By Stan Brakhage," *Film Culture*, 46 (Autumn 1967).

2. Northrop Frye, "The Keys to the Gates," in *Romanticism and Consciousness*, p. 237.

3. See Marjorie Keller, *The Untutored Eye: Childhood in the Films of Cocteau, Cornell, and Brakhage* (Rutherford: Associated University Presses, 1986).

4. Brakhage, *Metaphors on Vision*, p. 25.

5. Interview with the author, Spring 1965.

6. Ezra Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir* (New York: New Directions, 1960), p. 92.

7. Ibid., p. 94.

8. Ibid., p. 20.

9. After he gave up film-making Sidney Peterson gave the anamorphic lens he had used so often to Brakhage.

10. Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska,* p. 81.

11. Interview with the author, spring 1965.

12. See Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon, 1965), esp. the article " 'American-Type' Painting," pp. 208–29.

13. The link between Abstract Expressionism and Brakhage was first examined by Charles Boultenhouse in "Pioneer of the Abstract Expressionist Film," *Filmwise*, 1 (1961), and it was elaborated and made to encompass the aesthetics of the American avant-garde cinema as a whole by Annette Michelson in "Film and the Radical Aspiration," *Film Culture*, 42 (Fall 1966).

14. Jackson Pollock, "My Painting," *Possibilities*, 1 (Winter 1947–1948), and in *Readings in American Art*, p. 152.

15. "Art in New York," Radio Program, WNYC, Oct. 15, 1943.

16. "A Statement," *Tiger's Eye*, vol. 1, no. 6 (Dec. 15, 1948), and *Readings in American Art*, pp. 159–60.

17. *Metaphors on Vision*, pp. 72–73.

18. Interview with the author, Spring 1965.

19. The notes on *Songs I-XXII* are drawn from *The Film-Makers' Cooperative Catalogue*, 4 (1967), pp. 25–27. The notes on the subsequent *Songs* are drawn from the catalogue *Brakhage Films*, issue undated (Jane Brakhage, Rollinsville, Colo.).

20. Interview with the author, Spring 1965.

21. Guy Davenport, "Two Essays on Brakhage and His *Songs,*" *Film Culture*, 40 (Spring 1966), p. 12.

22. Ibid., p. 11.

23. Brakhage is quoting the cry of Adrian Leverkuhn, the protagonist of Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus*, when his beloved nephew dies.

24. None of the close viewers of this film have felt the dreadful overtones which I have experienced, watching the conclusion more than a hundred times. In *Film Culture*, 46 (Autumn 1967), three opinions are gathered on the *23rd Psalm Branch*: Jerome Hill finds the "Coda" ecstatic, "a peaceful close" (p. 15). For Robert Lamberton, it recalls *Anticipation of the Night*: "The grace and joy of the movement of the children is beautifully and terribly a part of the thing, a part of despair and the beginning of hope" (p. 15). Finally Fred Camper believes Brakhage has reconciled the violence of the whole film in this image: "And then, we are confronted with an image that at once suggests harmony and violence, or the harmony of violence; an image that also suggests the cyclical nature of human history" (p. 18).

25. Paul de Man, "Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image," in *Romanticism and Consciousness*, p. 75.

26. In the *Songs* Brakhage has been exceptionally inventive in improvising effects and techniques for 8mm where specialized equipment does not exist. In *Song VII* he masked the images in numerous ways by placing his fingers in different positions over the lens. The anamorphosis of *Song VIII* was created by a glass ashtray held and revolved before the lens. As I have already said, the split-second montage of the *23rd Psalm Branch* was made possible by the inclusion of two black frames between every change of shot. I suspect the mist effect here was made by the film-maker breathing on the lens before each shot.

27. Brakhage, *Metaphors on Vision*, pp. 47–48.

28. Program notes of the Whitney Museum of American Art, "New American Film-Makers Series," March 25–31, 1971.

29. It is a coincidence that *Quick Billy* resembles the first part of *Scenes from Under Childhood* more than any other Brakhage film. They were both made at the same time. From Baillie's notebooks on deposit at Anthology Film Archives it is clear that he came to certain crucial decisions, such as including a section of photographs from his youth, before he could have seen how Brakhage did the same.

30. Stan Brakhage, letter to Baillie, Jan. 15, 1969.

31. Whitehall, "Interview with Bruce Baillie," p. 20.

8. ABSOLUTE ANIMATION

1. See *MM*, pp. 22–26.

2. See Len Lye, *Figures of Motion: Len Lye/Selected Writings*, ed. Wystan Curnow and Roger Horrocks (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1984).

3. Unpublished annotated filmography, Anthology Film Archives.

4. *Film-Makers' Cooperative Catalogue*, 3 (1965), pp. 57–58. *Nos. 8* and *9* seem to have disappeared. *No. 13* has been prefixed to a film shot through a kaleidoscope of the film-maker's construction, and called, at times, *The Tin Woodsman's Dream* (1967); the Harry Smith Archives lists it as *No. 16*. They assign *No. 15* (1965–1966) to a film of Seminole quilt designs. Four more films are assigned *No. 17* (1979), an extended version of *No. 11*; *No. 18* (1970–1980): *Mahagonny*, a film for four screens; *No. 19*, made of excerpts from *No. 13*, undated; and *No. 20: Fragments of a Faith Forgotten* (1981), combining *Nos. 13, 16*, and *19*. The dates on the notes are unreliable, especially concerning the earliest films. William Morrison argued at the Harry Smith Symposium of

the Getty Research Center, April 20, 2001, that Smith began to make films after meeting Oscar Fischinger and seeing his work in 1948.

5. P. Adams Sitney, "Harry Smith Interview," *Film Culture*, 37 (Summer 1965), p. 5. *American Magus Harry Smith: A Modern Alchemist*, ed. Paola Igliori (New York: Inandout, 1966), provides further information about Harry Smith's life and work. Interviews with Smith have been collected in *Think of the Self Speaking: Harry Smith—Selected Interviews*, ed. Rani Singh, introduction by Allen Ginsburg (Seattle: Elbow/Cityful, 1999).

6. Jonas Mekas, "Movie Journal," *Village Voice* (June 3, 1971).

7. John and James Whitney, "Film Notes," in *Art in Cinema*, pp. 61–62.

8. Sitney, "Harry Smith Interview," p. 9.

9. Ibid., pp. 10–11.

10. Sigmund Freud analyzed Schreber's book, "Psychoanalytical Notes upon an Autobiographical Case of Paranoia" in *Three Case Histories*, trans. Philip Rieff (New York: Collier, 1966). Annette Michelson presented a psychoanalytical reading of *No. 12* in "The Mummy's Return: A Kleinian Film Scenario" in *Meaning in the Visual Arts: A Centennial Commemoration of Erwin Panofsky (1892–1992)*, ed. Irving Lavin (Princeton: Institute for Advanced Study, 1992), pp. 335–50. See also Carroll, *Interpreting the Moving Image*, pp. 178–90.

11. Sitney, "Harry Smith Interview," p. 10.

12. Ibid., p. 10.

13. Ibid., p. 12.

14. Scott MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema: Interviews with Independent Filmmakers 3* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), has an updated interview. See also Wees, *LMT*, pp. 130–36.

15. Gene Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema* (New York: Dutton, 1970), p. 168.

16. Ibid., p. 174.

17. Ibid., p. 174.

18. Ibid., p. 173.

19. Rammurti Mishra. *Fundamentals of Yoga* (New York: Lancer, 1959), p. 195; Lama Anagarika Govinda, *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism* (New York: Weiser, 1970), p. 184.

9. THE GRAPHIC CINEMA: EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVES

1. Greenberg, *Art and Culture*, pp. 72–73.

2. Guy Coté, "Interview with Robert Breer." *Film Culture*, 27 (Winter 1962–1963), p. 17.

3. Noel Burch, "Films of Robert Breer," *Film Quarterly*, 11, no. 3 (Spring 1959).

4. Coté, "Interview," p. 18.

5. Fernand Léger, "A New Realism—The Object," *Introduction to the Art of the Movies*, p. 97.

6. Unpublished interview, Anthology Film Archives.

7. Jonas Mekas and P. Adams Sitney, "Interview with Robert Breer," *Film Culture*, 56–57 (Spring 1973), p. 44.

8. Robert Breer, "Letter," *Film Culture*, 56–57 (Spring 1973), p. 70.

9. Mekas and Sitney, "Interview," p. 40; Charles Levine, "An Interview with Robert Breer," *Film Culture*, 56–57 (Spring 1973), pp. 58–59.

10. Robert Breer, "What Happened?" *Film Culture*, 26 (Fall 1962), p. 58.

11. Recent Breer studies include Lois Mendelson, *Robert Breer: A Study of His Work in the Context of the Modernist Tradition* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1981); MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 2*; Jennifer Burford, *Robert Breer*, in French and English, trans. Pip Chodorov (Paris: Paris Experimental, Re:Voir Editions, 1999).

12. Recent Kubelka studies: Christian Lebrat, ed. *Peter Kubelka* (Paris: Paris Experimental, 1990); Gabriele Jutz and Peter Tscherkassky, eds., *Peter Kubelka* (Vienna: PVS, 1995).

13. Jonas Mekas, "An Interview with Peter Kubelka," *Film Culture*, 44 (Spring 1967), p. 45.

14. On January 30, 1977, at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Kubelka premiered *Pause!*, a twelve-minute film composed entirely of images and sounds of Arnulf Rainer performing his body art.

15. An edited transcript of some of Kubelka's lectures at New York University appears as "The Theory of Metrical Film," in P. Adams Sitney, *The Avant-Garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism* (New York: New York University Press, Anthology Film Archives, 1978), pp. 139–59.

16. Peter Kubelka, "Working for the Next 1000 Years," *Cinema*, 9 (1971), pp. 29–30.

17. Mekas, "An Interview with Peter Kubelka," p. 43.

10. APOCALYPSES AND PICARESQUES

1. See Brakhage, *FWE*, on MacLaine and Conner; Peterson, *Dreams of Chaos, Visions of Order*, on Conner, Jordan, and Nelson; Scott MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema: Interviews with Independent Filmmakers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), interviews with Conner and Nelson; J. J. Murphy, "Christopher MacLaine—Approaching *The End*," *Film Culture*, 70–71 (1983); Carel Rowe, *The Baudelairean Cinema: A Trend within the American Avant-Garde* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1982), and James, *Allegories of Cinema* on Rice; *2000 BC: The Bruce Connor Story, Part II* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1999), esp. Bruce Jenkins, "Explosion in a Film Factory: The Cinema of Bruce Conner," pp. 185–223; Elder, *BOV*, pp. 24–35; Anthony Reveaux, *Bruce Conner* (Minneapolis: Film in the Cities, 1981); J. Hoberman, *To Tightrope Walkers Everywhere: The Collaborative Films of Robert Nelson and William T. Wiley* (Minneapolis: Film in the Cities, 1979); P. Adams Sitney, *Larry Jordan* (Minneapolis: Film in the Cities, 1980).

2. Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," *Interpretation*, ed. Charles Singleton (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1969), p. 202.

3. *Film-Makers' Cooperative Catalogue*, 5 (1971), pp. 270–71.

4. Ron Rice, "*The Flower Thief*," Cinema 16 film notes (April 25, 1962).

5. *Fourth International Experimental Film Competition*, catalogue (Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique, Brussels, 1967), p. 80.

6. P. Adams Sitney, "Larry Jordan Interview," *Film Culture*, 52 (Spring 1971), p. 80.

7. *Canyon Cinema Cooperative Catalogue*, 2 (1969), p. 55.

11. RECOVERED INNOCENCE

1. See Lindley Hanlon, *Ken Jacobs* (Minneapolis: Film in the Cities, 1979); "Ken Jacobs, Interviewed by Lindley Hanlon," *Film Culture*, 67–68–69 (1979); David Ehrenstein, *Film: The Front Line—1984* (Denver: Arden, 1984); MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 3*; Brakhage, *FWE*; David Schwartz, ed., *Films That Tell Time: A Ken Jacobs Retrospective* (New York: American Museum of the Moving Image, 1989).

2. *Film-Makers' Cooperative Catalogue*, 5, pp. 165–66.

3. Unpublished interview, Anthology Film Archives.

4. Ibid.

5. *Film-Makers' Cooperative Catalogue*, 5, p. 166.

6. Ibid., p. 167.

7. Jonas Mekas, "Movie Journal," *Village Voice* (May 2, 1963).

8. David James, ed., *To Free the Cinema: Jonas Mekas and the New York Underground* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), combines excellent critical essays on the films with personal memoirs, useful apparatus; MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 2*; Judy Briggs, *Jonas Mekas* (Minneapolis: Film in the Cities, 1980).

9. Jonas Mekas, "Notes on the New American Cinema," *Film Culture*, 24 (Spring 1962), p. 15.

10. Jonas Mekas, "Movie Journal," *Village Voice* (Oct. 23, 1963).

11. Mekas, "Notes," p. 15.

12. See Harold Bloom, *The Visionary Company* (New York: Doubleday, 1961).

13. Deborah Solomon identified the gravesite as that of Cornell's friend, Joyce Hunter, for whom he had a stone erected. See her *Utopia Parkway: The Life and Work of Joseph Cornell* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1997).

14. I treat Cornell's *Rose Hobart* and Cornell's other films more extensively in "The Cinematic Gaze of Joseph Cornell," in Kynaston McShine, ed., *Joseph Cornell* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1980); see Keller, *The Untutored Eye*; Jodie Hauptman, *Joseph Cornell: Stargazing in the Cinema* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); Annette Michelson, "Rose Hobart and Monsieur Phot: Early Films from Utopia Parkway," *Artforum*, 11, no. 10 (June 1973).

15. Unpublished interview, Anthology Film Archives. See Jack Smith, *Wait for Me at the Bottom of the Pool: The Writings of Jack Smith*, ed. J. Hoberman and Edward Leffingwell (New York: High Risk, 1997).

16. Jack Smith, "Belated Appreciation of V.S.," *Film Culture*, 31 (Winter 1963–1964), p. 4. In *Wait for Me at the Bottom of the Pool*, p. 41, Hoberman and Leffingwell silently emend "explanations plots" to "explanation plots."

17. Jack Smith, "The Perfect Filmic Appositeness of Maria Montez," *Film Culture*, 27 (Winter 1962–1963), p. 31.

18. Ibid., p. 32.

19. Smith, "Belated Appreciation," pp. 4–5.

20. Ken Kelman, "Smith Myth," *Film Culture*, 29 (Summer 1963), p. 5. J. Hoberman's superb essay "The Big Heat: The Making and Unmaking of *Flaming Creatures*," in *Flaming Creature Jack Smith: His Amazing Life and Times*, ed. Edward Leffingwell, Carole Kismaric, and Marvin Heiferman (New York: Institute of Contemporary Art/P.S. 1 Museum, 1997), gives the production history and reception of the film. See also *Artforum*, 36, no. 2 (October 1997): "Jack by

Popular Demand: Jack Smith in Retrospect"; Suarez, *Bike Boys, Drag Queens & Superstars*; J. Hoberman, *On Jack Smith's* Flaming Creatures *(and Other Secret-Flix of Cinemaroc)* (New York: Granary/Hips Road, 2001).

21. Jonas Mekas, "Notes on Some New Movies and Happiness," *Film Culture*, 37 (Summer 1965), pp. 18–19.

22. Program notes of the Museum of Modern Art Department of Film (June 23, 1970).

23. Pip Chodorov and Christian Lebrat, eds., *Le livre de Walden* (Paris: Light Cone Video, 1997), and Chodorov and Elodie Imbeau with Christian Lebrat, eds., *The Lost, Lost, Lost Book* (Paris: Light Cone Video, 2000), offer detailed commentary and essays on two films from the *Diaries, Notes, and Sketches* series.

24. *Film-Makers' Cooperative Catalogue*, 5, p. 167. Bart Testa's *Back and Forth: Early Cinema and the Avant-Garde* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1992) discusses the importance and influence of *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son*. William C. Wees's *Recycled Images: The Art and Politics of Found Footage Film* (New York: Anthology Film Archives, 1993) offers a history of found footage in avant-garde cinema. *Exploding Special Issue: Ken Jacobs* Tom, Tom the Piper's Son (Paris: Light Cone Video, 2001), in French and English, contains Jacobs's essay "Beating My Tom Tom" and ten essays on the film by French critics and scholars.

12. STRUCTURAL FILM

1. Since my initial formulation of the concept of structural film in an article in *Film Culture*, 47 (Summer 1969), it has been controversial. In *Film Culture Reader*, ed. P. Adams Sitney (New York: Praeger, 1970; reprinted New York: Cooper Square, 2000), I published George Maciunas's attack on it. Peter Gidal's *Structural Film Anthology* (London: BFI, 1976) is the most expansive of several British reformulations. The critical literature in America is extensive. See Paul Arthur, "Structural Film: Revisions, New Versions, and the Artifact," *Millennium Film Journal*, 2 (Spring–Summer 1978); Paul Arthur, "Structural Film: Revisions, New Versions, and the Artifact: Part Two," *Millennium Film Journal*, 4–5 (Summer–Fall 1979); Bruce Jenkins, "The Case against 'Structural Film,' " *Journal of the University Film Association*, 33, no. 2 (Spring 1981).

2. Stephen Koch, *Stargazer* (New York: Praeger, 1973), pp. 22–23. Koch's book, revised and updated (New York: Marion Boyars, 1991), remains a preeminent study in the extensive literature on Warhol's cinema. Michael O'Pray, ed., *Andy Warhol: Film Factory* (London: BFI, 1989); James, *Allegories of Cinema*; Suarez, *Bike Boys, Drag Queens & Superstars*.

3. Koch, *Stargazer*, p. 23.

4. Ibid., pp. 54–55.

5. *Film Culture*, 46 (Autumn 1967), p. 1. Reprinted in Michael Snow, *The Collected Writings of Michael Snow* [the Michael Snow Project] (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1994). The four volumes of the Michael Snow Project dominate the considerable recent literature on his films: in *The Michael Snow Project: Visual Art 1951–1993* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1994); Philip Monk's "Around *Wavelenth*: The Sculpture, Film and Photo-Work of Michael Snow 1967–1968," pp. 290–385, extensively documents the making and reception of the film; Jim Shedden, ed., *Presence and Absence: The Films of Mi-*

chael Snow 1956–1991 [The Michael Snow Project] (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1994), examines all of his films until the early 1990s; Regina Cornwell's *Snow Seen—The Films and Photographs of Michael Snow* (Toronto: Peter Martin, 1980) was the first volume devoted to his films. R. Bruce Elder's *Image and Identity: Reflections on Canadian Film and Culture* (Waterloo: Wilfird Laurier University Press, 1989) treats *Wavelength* and *The Central Region* in great detail. Scott MacDonald, *Avant-Garde Film: Motion Studies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), analyzes *Wavelength*.

6. Annette Michelson, "Toward Snow," *Artforum*, 9, no. 10 (June 1971), p. 31.

7. Jonas Mekas and P. Adams Sitney, "Conversation with Michael Snow," *Film Culture*, 46 (Autumn 1967), p. 3.

8. Michael Snow, "Letter," *Film Culture*, 46 (Autumn 1967), p. 5.

9. *Film-Makers' Cooperative Catalogue*, 5 (1971), p. 301.

10. Michael Snow, "On *La Région Centrale,*" *Film Culture*, 52 (Spring 1971), p. 61.

11. Ibid., pp. 62–63.

12. *Film Culture*, 65–66 (1978), devoted to Sharits, includes his writings, an essay by Annette Michelson, Rosalind Krauss's catalogue for the Albright-Knox Art Gallery exhibition of 1976, and an interview with Linda Cathcart; see also Stuart Liebman, *Paul Sharits* (Minneapolis: Film in the Cities, 1981).

13. Paul Sharits, "Notes on Films," *Film Culture*, 47 (Summer 1969), p. 15.

14. See P. Adams Sitney, *George Landow* (Minneapolis: Film in the Cities, 1981). Hollis Frampton's *Circles of Confusion: Film, Photography, Video Texts 1968–1980* (Rochester: Visual Studies Workshop, 1983) is the most important text in the poetics of films published since Brakhage's *Metaphors on Vision*. The French volume, *L'ecliptique du savoir: film, photographie, video*, ed. Annette Michelson and Jean-Michel Bouhours, trans. Jean-Francoise Cornu (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1999), contains additional texts. Annette Michelson, ed., *October*, 32 (Spring 1985) [Hollis Frampton Issue], is a valuable resource. See Bruce Jenkins and Susan Krane, *Hollis Frampton: Recollections, Recreations* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1984); MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema* (1988); MacDonald, *Avant-Garde Film: Motion Studies*, analyzes *Zorns Lemma*.

15. Hollis Frampton, unpublished notes, Anthology Film Archives.

13. THE SEVENTIES

1. Katrina Martin has translated and commented in detail on the puns of *Anémic Cinéma* in "Marcel Duchamp's *Anémic Cinéma,*" *Studio International*, 189, no. 973 (Jan.–Feb. 1975), pp. 53–60.

2. For an extended analysis of Landow's *Wide Angle Saxon* and *On the Marriage Broker Joke as Cited by Sigmund Freud in His Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious or Can the Avant-Garde Artist Be Wholed* (1980), see *MM*, pp. 211–25.

3. George Landow, "Notes on Film," *Canyon Cinema News*, 2 (1977), pp. 8–9.

4. Hollis Frampton, "(nostalgia): voice-over narration for film of that name, dated 1/8/71," *Film Culture*, 53–55 (Spring 1972), p. 11.

5. Hollis Frampton, "A Pentagram for Conjuring the Narrative," *Form and Structure in Recent Film*, ed. Dennis Wheeler (Vancouver Art Gallery, 1972).

6. Simon Field, "Zorns Lemma and Hapax Legomena: Interview with Hollis Frampton," *Afterimage*, 4 (Autumn 1972), pp. 54, 59 (abridged).

7. Frampton, "A Pentagram for Conjuring the Narrative." In *Structural Film Anthology* ("Letter from Hollis Frampton to Peter Gidal on *Zorns Lemma*," p. 75), he ironically acknowledges his relationship to Duchamp: "The rumour (anyway) that my mother's name was Rose Selavy is substantially correct, and I think she has something to teach us all about the intimacy of ties between language and perception."

8. Frampton's theoretical exposition of this distinction can be found in "The Withering Away of the State of Art," *Artforum*, 13, no. 4 (Dec. 1974), pp. 50–54.

9. Yvonne Rainer, *Work* 1961–73 (Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, New York University Press, Halifax, New York), p. 213.

10. *Film-Makers' Cooperative Catalogue*, 6, pp. 31–32.

11. "Twelfth Independent Film Award," *Film Culture*, 61 (1975), p. 1.

12. Recent Gehr studies include P. Adams Sitney, *Gehr* (Minneapolis: Film in the Cities, 1980); Richard Foreman, "On Ernie Gehr's Film *Still*," *Film Culture*, 63–64 (1976); Regina Cornwell, "Work of Ernie Gehr from 1968 to 1972," *Film Culture*, 63–64 (1976); MacDonald, *Avant-garde Film: Motion Studies*, which analyzes *Serene Velocity*; Testa, *Back and Forth: Early Cinema and the Avant-Garde*, which discusses the importance of *Eureka*; Steve Anker, ed., *Films of Ernie Gehr: A Collection of Original Writings, Photographic Pieces and Stills* (San Francisco: SF Cinematheque, 1983); David Schwartz, ed., *Serene Intensity: The Films of Ernie Gehr* (New York: American Museum of the Moving Image, 1999); Gilberto Perez, "Ghosts of the City: The Films of Ernie Gehr," *Yale Review*, 87, no. 4 (October 1999).

13. Ernie Gehr, "Program Notes by Ernie Gehr for a Film Showing at the Museum of Modern Art, New York City, February 2, 1971 at 5:30 P.M.," *Film Culture*, 53–55 (Spring 1972), pp. 36–37.

14. Ken Kelman, "Portrait of the Young Man as Artist," *Film Culture*, 67–68–69 (1979), pp. 196, 198–99. Several texts by Beavers and about Beavers by Gregory Markopoulos were published in limited editions by Temenos in Florence and Rome; some of these are gathered together with an interview and critical articles in Tony Pipolo and Graham Weinbren, eds., *Millennium Film Journal*, 32/33 [Robert Beavers, Gregory J. Markopoulos] (Fall 1998). See also Tom Chomont, "A Note on *Count of Days*, a Film by Robert Beavers," *Film Culture*, 48–49 (Winter-Spring 1970); Gregory Markopoulos, "The Language of Diamonds, *Film Culture*, 52 (Winter 1971–1972), and "Love's Task," *Film Culture*, 53–54–55 (Spring 1972); Beavers's "Notes filmed for *From the Notebooks of* . . . appears in the same issue.

14. THE END OF THE 20TH CENTURY

1. The most persistent and comprehensive historian of this period of American avant-garde film-making has been Paul Arthur. See his articles "Bodies, Language, and the Impeachment of Vision: American Avant-Garde Film at Fifty," *Persistence of Vision*, 11 (1995), pp. 5–32; "The Western Edge: Oil of L.A. and the Machined Image," *Millennium Film Journal*, 12 (1982–1983), pp. 8–28; "The Last of the Last Machine: Avant-Garde Film since 1966," *Millennium Film*

Journal, 16/17/18 (Fall/Winter 1986–1987), pp. 68–94; "Desire for Allegory: The Whitney Biennials," *Motion Picture*, 2, no. 1 (Fall 1987), pp. 1, 5–15; "The Appearance of History in Recent Avant-Garde Film," *Framework*, 2, no. 3 (1989), pp. 39–45; "The Avant-garde in '97," *Film Comment*, 34, no. 1 (Jan.–Feb. 1998), pp. 8, 11; "The Avant-garde in '98," *Film Comment*, 35, no. 1 (Jan.–Feb. 1999), pp. 38–39.

Fred Camper's "The End of Avant-Garde Film," *Millennium Film Journal* 16/17/18 (Fall/Winter 1986–1987), pp. 69–94, describes the crisis as Camper then perceived it. His film reviews for the *Chicago Reader* in the late 1990s reverse that assessment, sounding a celebratory note. Tom Gunning's essay "Towards a Minor Cinema: Foneroff, Herwitz, Ahwesh, Lapore, Klahr and Solomon," in *Motion Picture*, 3, nos. 1–2 (Winter 1989–1990), pp. 2–6, anticipates in different terms and categories, and excepting Klahr in the work of different artists, what I call in this chapter the turn away from Menippea. David E. James's "Hollywood Extras: One Tradition of 'Avant-Garde' Film in Los Angeles," *October*, 90 (Fall 1999), pp. 3–22, posits a local tradition of avant-garde production in Los Angeles.

2. See Wees, *Recycled Images*. The production of important found footage films has increased geometrically since the publication of Wees's book.

3. Frampton, *Circles of Confusion*, p. 63

4. Teresa De Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), pp. 78, 80.

5. Annette Michelson recognized the importance of this emerging genre, devoting *October*, 17 (Summer 1981), to it as "The New Talkies" issue.

6. Scott MacDonald first pointed out the relationship of Benning's film to Dos Passos's novels. MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 2*, p. 221. The major films of the mid-seventies use interlocking, fragmentary narratives reminiscent of Dos Passos. The later films, of the nineties especially, dispense with the web of narratives but substitute another Dos Passos strategy: capsule biographies and newspaper items.

7. Surajan Ganguly, "Stan Brakhage—The 60th Birthday Interview," *Film Culture*, 78 (Summer 1994), p. 28.

8. Douglas Preston, "Cannibals of the Canyon," *New Yorker* (Nov. 30, 1998). Preston's article and Turner's book (with Jacqueline Turner), *Man Corn: Cannibalism and Violence In the Prehistoric American Southwest* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1998), appeared after both films were made. However, Turner's thesis was known among anthropologists for more than twenty years.

9. *Film-makers' Cooperative Catalogue*, 7, New York, 1989, p. 171.

10. B. Ruby Rich reads the Stonehenge shots less ambiguously: "mute mysterious witness to pre-history, interpreted sardonically as standing for 'flight, romantic agony, futility of effort, history as impenetrable.' . . . The circle of stones is an analogue for the psychoanalytic session, that circling and probing of essential mysteries removed from time, space, and social context." Thus the film as a whole argues "[t]he human psyche must somehow relate to the social body politic. Psychoanalysis must be made to acknowledge history. Berlin becomes, for Rainer, their meeting ground." Yvonne Rainer, *The Films of Yvonne Rainer: An Introduction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 19.

11. Madeleine Leskin, "So This Is Called Moving?" (interview with Abigail

Child), *Skop*, Berlin, February 1989. I am quoting from a manuscript edited by Child.

12. Apparently Frampton was quoting from memory. He wrote: "How many colors are there in a field of grass to the crawling baby who never heard of green." Brakhage returned the compliment in kind at least twice: in "Poetry and Film" [*Brakhage Scrapbook*, p. 220] he unwittingly makes a little story of seduction and abandonment out of it: "As Hollis has it with the birds they say "good morning," "I found a worm," "fuck me," "get out," "good night." In "Gertrude Stein: Meditative Literature and Film," the same misremembered sequence may have been cosmetically corrected for delivery before the faculty of the University of Colorado: "There are only about five stories, epitomized by filmmaker Hollis Frampton thinking of the five bird-songs: (1) Good Morning. (2) I found a worm. (3) Love me. (4) Get out. (5) Good Night." In "A Pentagram for Conjuring the Narrative," Frampton had claimed to understand the language of birds:

> One fine morning, I awoke to discover that, during the night, I had learned to understand the language of birds. I have listened to them ever since. They say: 'Look at me!' or: 'Get out of here!' or: 'Let's fuck!' or: 'Help!' or: 'I found a worm!' and that's *all* they say. And that, when you boil it down, is about all we say.
>
> (Which of those things am I saying now?)

13. Frampton, *Circles of Confusion*, p. 83.

14. *Film-Makers' Cooperative Catalogue*, 7, p. 469.

15. Schneemann and Tenney were the lovers of Brakhage's *Loving* (1956) and appeared with Brakhage and his wife Jane in *Cat's Cradle* (1959).

16. Because laboratories confused prints and printing materials, Mekas took the serial title, *Diaries, Notes, and Sketches* off the installments of his diary after *Walden*. However, he considers all of his works in both film and video, excepting *Guns of the Trees* and *The Brig*, as parts of that composite film.

17. MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema* 2, p. 187.

18. The most explicit threnody is one of Mekas's videotapes, *Scenes from Allen's Last Three Days on Earth as a Spirit* (1998), in which he filmed in Allen Ginsberg's loft from the laying out of Ginsberg's body to his memorial service.

19. Macdonald, *A Critical Cinema 3*, p. 249

20. Jonas Mekas, "The Diary Film," in Sitney, *The Avant-Garde Film*, p. 192.

21. Elder, *BOV*, pp. 329–332.

22. Ibid., p. 333.

23. Mekas, "The Diary Film," p. 191.

24. Warren Sonbert, "Friendly Witness," *Motion Picture*, 3, nos. 1/2 (Winter 1989–1990), p. 7.

25. Warren Sonbert, "Film Syntax," *Hills*, 6/7 (Spring 1980), pp. 122, 130.

26. Ibid., p. 122.

27. Scott MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 3*, pp. 246, 244, 247.

28. Ibid., p. 252 (ellipses mine).

29. P. Adams Sitney, "Saugus Series," *Millennium Film Journal*, 16/17/18 (Fall/Winter 1986–1987), p. 160.

30. *Canyon Cinema Film/Video Catalogue 2000* (San Francisco, 2000), p. 186.

31. J. Hoberman, "Attack of the Mutants: Tracking the Resurgence of Experimental Film," *The Voice* (March 8–14, 2000).

32. Albert Kilchesty, ed., *Big As Life: An American History of 8mm Films* (New York: Museum of Modern Art; San Francisco: SF Cinematheque, 1998).

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